

CIVILITY, ANONYMITY AND THE BREAKDOWN OF A NEW PUBLIC SPHERE

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Reader comment forums of online newspapers, a relatively new feature of online journalism, have been called spaces of public deliberation. At their inception among large newspapers just five years ago, the forums were heralded as a new way for the public to advance public dialogue by sharing opinions in an unconstrained way, promoting the democratic principles of the newspaper institution itself. Rampant incivility, however, has since become one the forums' chief defining characteristics. By content analyzing comments from online newspapers that allow anonymity, this research confirms anecdotal evidence from journalists that Latinos are regularly debased in the forums by commenters following news on immigration. This study also compares the civility of anonymous comments following news on the Tea Party movement, a non-racialized but also controversial topic. Finally, civility is measured in the comments following news on immigration from online newspapers that have disallowed anonymity. In all, more than 22,000 comments from nearly 200 news stories in more than a dozen online newspapers were collected between 2010 and 2012, and a sample of 1,350 was coded. The analysis shows that online newspaper discussion boards that allow anonymity and that follow

news about immigration predominantly contain comments by those who support tough immigration laws and who express themselves with emotionally laden, uncivil comments directed at Latinos. Similar discussion boards that disallow anonymity predominantly contain comments by those who support tough immigration laws and who express themselves with emotionally laden yet civil comments directed at Latinos. Overall, this research demonstrates that a racialized topic is apt to draw more uncivil anonymous comments than a non-racialized one and that removing anonymity elevates the level of dialogue. Building on the theories of the public sphere, reduced cues in anonymity and critical race theory, this paper demonstrates that in their new role in creating a new public square of open discussion, newspapers are sometimes creating forums for hate speech while also publishing content that is perpetuating negative portrayals of Latinos. Findings reveal that a new public sphere created by online newspapers, meant to promote democracy, is actually having the opposite effect for some minority groups.

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For Tami, Nathaniel, Norah and Will

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When President Obama stood before the nation to present his State of the Union address in January 2011, he spoke of a polarized society that had been torn apart by divisive partisan bickering. He condemned an environment where divisive political fervor had poisoned the public discourse, where searing political rhetoric was splitting an already divided nation. He urged Americans to temper their sharp political discourse and laid part of the blame at the feet of the news media. He called for a moment of pause to “make sure that we are talking with each other in a way that heals, not a way that wounds.”¹ Bill Keller, executive editor of *The New York Times*, echoed the sentiment soon after, claiming that the national discourse was more polarized than it had been in the past and that some in the news media were complicit in contributing to the acrimony.²

References to the “national discourse” usually revolve around the news media’s agenda and their commentary or coverage. Left out of such references, however, is the public itself and the way in which people have joined the fray in setting the tone of a nation’s discourse. In that context, online reader comment forums of conventional U.S. newspapers offer an unprecedented opportunity to gauge the public’s consciousness. It is in these discussion boards that readers from across the country register their opinions on the current events of the day, positioning the forums as potentially representing a new index of operative social values of U.S. society.

Newspapers herald the boards as sites of constructive dialogue and spirited debate — facilitating the very thing newspapers were designed to do in a democratic society. As with any form of new and largely untested technology, however, there have been

disquieting ramifications. Citing the pervasive incivility that has become one the boards' chief defining characteristics, newspaper journalists and publishers worry that the vitriolic tone of the comments, including name-calling and the often-overt sexism and racism that many commenters exhibit, is undermining the value of the forums. One solution, they say, is to end anonymity in the boards. As syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts Jr. has pointed out in his call to end anonymous comments, "Far from validating some high-minded ideal of public debate, message boards — particularly those inadequately policed by their newspapers and/or dealing with highly emotional matters — have become havens for a level of crudity, bigotry, meanness and plain nastiness that shocks the tattered remnants of our propriety."³ Often caught in the crosshairs of the incivility are marginalized groups, including gays, women and racial minorities. Indeed, anecdotal evidence from newspaper reporters that Latinos⁴ are regularly maligned in the forums of online newspapers⁵ is the catalyst for this research.

McCluskey and Hmielowski contend that the tone of online reader posts has thus far received little scholarly attention.⁶ Instead, most research into online reader posts has focused on the frequency and technology of news organizations in providing reader posts, or how news organizations, such as reporters, react to the posts. Part of the reason the scholarship on reader comments remains diffuse is that comments generally fit within a broader context of user-generated content (UGC),⁷ a relatively new communication field that covers a range of media content available in a range of communications technologies, including blogging, podcasting, review sites, social networking and wikis. Considering that 25% of Internet users say they have commented on an online news story or blog post they read,⁸ examining user comments — and, more specifically, the tone of

opinion expression in user comments — is important because it is one way to measure the efficacy of the comments in the context of their contribution to constructive discussion and debate as news organizations increasingly rely on them in their effort to expand public engagement.

Background

Though they are relatively new, online reader commenting forums are becoming ubiquitous among newspapers. Among the top 100 U.S. newspapers, 33% accepted article comments in some form in 2007; the following year, it had risen to 75%.⁹ By 2010, among the top 150 U.S. newspapers in 2010, 92% accepted online comments.¹⁰ Unlike news stories, which can live on newspaper websites for months, years and even indefinitely in online archives, reader comments are usually an ephemeral part of a newspaper's content; they can appear and disappear while the original story remains on a newspaper's website. As such, the tone of reader comments might vary from day to day, depending on whether the discussion board is open or closed and the extent to which a discussion has been moderated.

While the moderation of comments varies by newspaper, comments often post immediately, though auto filters generally disallow vulgar language. In this way, unmoderated comment boards might tend to have more acerbic language than those cleaned up and closed by moderators. Still, even after the boards are moderated and closed, entire discussion sections can and do disappear; at many Gannett newspapers, online stories — and the accompanying comment forums — are free for the public's perusal for only 30 days.

Recognizing the problem with ad hominem attacks, newspapers have developed strategies aimed at reducing incivility, including explicit policies for weeding out uncivil comments. As Rose points out,¹¹ however, the only way to enforce the policies effectively is to review all comments before they are posted, which is something large newspapers such as *The New York Times* have the resources to do. More often, however, moderators — or in some cases, even reporters — wait for complaints from readers before considering removing a comment. This practice, however, seems largely an exercise in subjectivity. For example, on Oct. 30, 2010, following a *Los Angeles Times* story about immigration, a commenter wrote that one way to get rid of undocumented immigrants was to “form an army and hunt them down like deer.” Though at least 11 readers flagged the comment as inappropriate, it remained on the *Times* website for months. That is not to say moderators are not busy. Moderators sometimes remove a comment with a note that the comment has been removed. On eight news stories, columns and blogs about immigration in summer 2010, the *Houston Chronicle* ran 2,616 comments. Moderators who felt that the commenter did not abide by the rules of the boards removed 817 (31%) of the comments.

One idea gaining ground is the creation of semi-autonomous online communities where contributors police themselves by removing their anonymity. In March 2011, Facebook unveiled an updated Comments Box social plugin that allows third-party websites to display reader comments. Sites that use this function hope to eliminate reader anonymity by making readers sign into their Facebook account before registering a comment. Facebook insists that its more than 900 million members use their real names in their profiles, and the new platform shows the commenters’ profile picture and name

beside their comment. About 50,000 websites already use the platform, including some newspapers such as the *San Jose Mercury News*.¹² Other online newspapers, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, do not use the Facebook plugin but require that readers create accounts with their real names before participating in online discussions.

Newspapers encourage reading and posting comments and are aware of the often-fervent dialogue that occurs in the comment boards. In its “Rules of Engagement,” *The Arizona Republic* tells readers that they “expect and encourage heated, robust debate.”¹³ The newspaper also allows comment browsers to sort the comments by those with the worst ratings, which are usually those with the most caustic sentiments. *The Los Angeles Times* has a blog that highlights the comment sections. Called, “Comments Blog,” its tagline is: “Because sometimes, the comments are the best part.”¹⁴

Despite some forays into non-anonymous comment boards, the vast majority of online newspapers allow readers to register a comment anonymously, usually with a self-selected pseudonym. The anonymity gives individuals reluctant to reveal their true identities, proponents of anonymity argue, an unfettered avenue to express their views. Indeed, research has shown that anonymity in comment boards expands the number of participants in the discourse as well as the range of views aired.¹⁵ The free-for-all nature of anonymous discussion forums, however, has a down side, opponents of anonymity argue: coarse race hatred from what some describe as a small but vocal minority.

“Although you rarely hear racial insults on Main Street these days,” Jesse Washington of the Associated Press writes, “there’s a place where unashamed bigotry is all too easy to find: tossed off in the comments section of some of the Internet’s most popular websites, today’s virtual Main Street.”¹⁶

Focus Of This Research

This research examines readers' comments in online newspapers that follow two areas that have generated robust news coverage in the past few years: immigration, chiefly involving Arizona Senate Bill 1070 (SB 1070), and the Tea Party movement. Both topics have received significant news coverage among newspapers in the past several years — a period of tumultuous political divisiveness due, perhaps in no small part, to a war in the Middle East, an ongoing recession that began in 2007 and a run-up to another presidential election. During that time, newspaper companies have been in the throes of a shift in the way news is presented and delivered. As of 2008, more people get their news online than in print.¹⁷ One of the ways that newspapers have responded to the changing medium of choice for their readers is to embrace a more participatory model, one in which the general public is invited to contribute content.

This paper examines the extent to which newspaper comment forums are one of the newest forms of what Jürgen Habermas called a public sphere — an area in social life where people gather to identify and discuss what they see as societal problems in order to influence political action. The chief purpose of this research is to examine the extent to which a new public sphere created by online newspapers in their support of democracy-enabling dialogue instead actually disables the democratic process of some social groups, namely Latinos, by excluding and marginalizing them with pervasive, largely unchecked incivility. Examining such variables as anonymity, story topic, position and type of argument used, this research examines the role of online newspapers in facilitating a new public sphere and the ways in which, for some, such a public space is possibly yielding an anti-democratic outcome. Ultimately, reader comment forums represent a new way for

online newspapers to engage the public and encourage dialogue while also generating Web hits and building brand loyalty, which, some have claimed, help sustain newspapers' financial survivability in a turbulent age of convergence.¹⁸ This research concludes by asking: At what cost to ethnic minorities and the democracy-enabling function of online newspapers?

Notes

¹ Helene Cooper and Jeff Zeleny, "Obama Calls for a New Era of Civility in U.S. Politics," *The New York Times*, Jan. 12, 2011, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/13/us/13obama.html>>.

² Keach Hagey, "The New York Times Vs. Fox News," *Politico*, Feb. 1, 2011, <<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0211/48625.html>>.

³ Leonard Pitts Jr., "The Anonymous Back-Stabbing of Internet Message Boards," *The Seattle Times*, March 31, 2010, <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/editorialsopinion/2011488655_pitts01.html>.

⁴ This paper will use the term "Latino" as opposed to "Hispanic." While both "Latino" and "Hispanic" are generally acceptable, some people have a strong preference. The term "Hispanic" usually refers to a descendant of a Spanish-speaking land or culture. A 2006 survey by the Pew Hispanic Center found that 48% of Latino adults describe themselves by their country of origin first; 26% use the terms Latino or Hispanic first; and 24% call themselves American on first reference. As for a preference between "Hispanic" and "Latino," a 2008 Center survey found that 36% of respondents prefer the term "Hispanic," 21% prefer the term "Latino," and the rest had no preference (See "Who is Hispanic?" *Pew Hispanic Center*, May 28, 2009, <<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/05/28/whos-hispanic/>>).

⁵ Arthur D. Santana, "Online Readers' Comments Represent New Opinion Pipeline," *Newspaper Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (2011).

⁶ Michael McCluskey and Jay Hmielowski, "Opinion Expression During Social Conflict: Comparing Online Reader Comments and Letters to the Editor," *Journalism* 13, no. 3 (2012).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kristen Purcell et al., "Understanding the Participatory News Consumer: How Internet and Cell Phone Users Have Turned News into a Social Experience," *Pew Internet &*

American Life Project, Project for Excellence in Journalism, March 1, 2010, <<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Online-News.aspx>>.

⁹ Jesse Johnson, "The Use of the Internet by America's Largest Newspapers," *The Bivings Report* (blog), Dec. 18, 2008, <<http://www.bivingsreport.com/2008/the-use-of-the-internet-by-americas-largest-newspapers-2008-edition/>>.

¹⁰ Santana, "Online Readers' Comments Represent New Opinion Pipeline."

¹¹ Adam Rose, "Louts Out: How to Police Message Boards and Comments," *Columbia Journalism Review* 47, no. 3 (2008).

¹² Josh Constine, "Facebook Updates Comments Box Plugin with Comment Exporting and Larger News Feed Stories," *Inside Facebook* (blog), April 12, 2011, <<http://www.insidefacebook.com/2011/04/12/comments-box-exporting-hotmail/>>.

¹³ Rules of Engagement, *AZCentral.com*, <<http://www.azcentral.com/help/articles/info-rulesofengagement.html>>.

¹⁴ Comments Blog, *LATimes.com*, <latimesblogs.latimes.com/.m/comments_blog/>.

¹⁵ McCluskey and Hmielowski, "Opinion Expression During Social Conflict: Comparing Online Reader Comments and Letters to the Editor."

¹⁶ Jesse Washington, "Web Provides Racists a Forum," *The Register-Guard* (Eugene, Ore.) Sept. 26, 2010, sect. A, p. 5.

¹⁷ Andrew Kohut and Michael Remez, "Internet Overtakes Newspapers as News Outlet. Biggest Stories of 2008: Economy Tops Campaign," *Pew Research Center for the People & the Press*, Dec. 23, 2008, <<http://www.people-press.org/2008/12/23/internet-overtakes-newspapers-as-news-outlet/>>.

¹⁸ Andrew Alexander, "Online Readers Need a Chance to Comment, But Not to Abuse," *The Washington Post*, April 4, 2010, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/02/AR2010040202324.html>>.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Sphere

Habermas has described the public sphere as a domain of social life where public opinion can be formed and access granted to all citizens.¹⁹ The concept of a public sphere comes into being when a group of private individuals — in the absence of political or state control — assemble and confer in an unrestricted fashion about matters of general interest, “thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely.”²⁰ As Hauser put it, a public sphere is a “discursive place in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment.”²¹ A public sphere emerges in concrete form not through the mere existence of an assemblage of people but rather through the *exchange* of public opinion by the assemblage of people.

This exchange has been considered an important element of the theory of democracy, where communities thrive on policy debates and where arguments and counter-arguments occur with the purpose of reaching a solution. “Of the many characterizations of democracy,” Sartori points out in his definition of the theory of democracy, “is ‘government by discussion.’ If this characterization is enlarged, it suggests that if democracies develop, more and more people discuss more and more.”²² Others have elaborated on this model, explaining that discursive deliberation among a citizenry would lead to better decisions and outcomes by everyone involved.²³ The key in this deliberative model is that no one is excluded (or felt to be excluded) from the process, especially those whom the argument is about or directly affects.

Habermas points out that from the conception of this idea, daily newspapers were seen to play a key role. An era of literary journalism of the second half of the eighteenth century created an environment where, as Karl Bücher wrote, newspapers changed from mere institutions for the publication of news into bearers and leaders of public opinion — “weapons of party politics.”²⁴ Newspapers, Habermas wrote, would continue to be considered institutions of the public trust effective in the manner of a public mediator and intensifier of public discussion. “The press remained an institution of the public itself,” Habermas wrote, “operating to provide and intensify public discussion, no longer a mere organ for the conveyance of information....”²⁵ During a bygone era when they were relatively easy to mass produce and distribute, newspapers were seen to be members of the public sphere inasmuch as they represented the voice of the people.

With the arrival of a more professional, detached and objective approach to journalism in the 1830s,²⁶ the voices of those deliberating in the newspaper came in the form of sources, with the journalist acting as gatekeeper, deciding which voice to present and which to ignore. Perhaps the more popular and modern understanding of newspapers’ role in the public sphere comes from their function in its maintenance. Instead of being seen as members of the public sphere, newspapers can now be regarded as enablers of a public sphere inasmuch as they facilitate the exchange of ideas by spurring discussion alongside the news they publish, part of what McCombs and Shaw saw as the agenda-setting function of the mass media.²⁷

Prior to the arrival of the Internet, Habermas argued in 1989, newspapers and periodicals, radio and television were seen to be the media of the public sphere.²⁸ The public discussions that newspapers facilitated were understood to circulate within society

largely via face-to-face verbal discourse and taking place not in a single space but rather throughout everyday interactions. “We hear a news story, and then we talk about it with friends,” writes McKee. “We exchange ideas on email groups, down at the pub, at the hairdresser; we telephone a talkback radio station, write a letter to a magazine, stop buying a newspaper because we disagree with its political stance. These human interactions are all part of the public sphere, just as much as the mass media are.”²⁹

Browne argues that Habermas pays more attention to person-to-person interaction as the customary vehicle for dialogue among individuals and within/between groups.³⁰

Other researchers have argued that comment boards in online newspapers could be seen as a new public sphere — a contemporary enactment of eighteenth-century European cafés. Researchers assessed the extent to which the form of digital discussion fit Habermas’ principles for democratic debate. A sample of more than 15,000 user-generated comments was selected from the online versions of five national newspapers from different political and journalistic contexts: *The Guardian* (United Kingdom), *Le Monde* (France), *The New York Times*, *El País* (Spain), and *La Repubblica* (Italy). Two models of audience participation emerged from the analysis, one where communities of debate were formed based on mostly respectful discussions between diverse points of view and another in which expressing feelings about current events dominated the contributions and where there was less of an argumentative debate. The researchers concluded that some online newspapers, such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, seemed to abide Habermas’ model better than others to the extent that the comments in those forums showed a greater deal of respect and diversity of ideas among participants.³¹

Indeed, *The New York Times* online summarizes the position of many newspapers in explaining that “we have created a space where readers can exchange intelligent and informed commentary that enhances the quality of our news and information.”³² McCluskey and Hmielowski argue that because online commenting boards allow the public to bypass the gatekeepers within news organizations that filter the traditional means for the public to express their opinion — in letters to the editor — they more closely resemble Habermas’ democratic utopia in which all citizens have an opportunity to participate in discussing important social and political matters. “Online readers posts thus offer the potential for a range of opinions that more closely matches ideals of the public sphere,” they write.³³

Other scholars have pointed out the emergence of the public sphere in the mass communication field via computer-mediated communication (CMC). The creation of virtual communities, for example, has been the focus of scholars such as Dyson, who argues that the Internet allows people who share common interests to communicate with one another regardless of geographic boundaries. Thus, two people from two different backgrounds who perhaps share a common interest might enter a virtual community via an online newspaper comment board and exchange opinions where they otherwise would not. In this way, Dyson writes, “the Internet can be a powerful enabling technology fostering the development of communities because it supports the very thing that creates a community — human interaction.”³⁴

Dahlberg, however, questions whether online discourse is in fact extending the public sphere.³⁵ He outlines six requirements that must exist for the existence of a public sphere: autonomy from state and economic power; exchange and critique of normative

positions; reflexivity; ideal role taking; sincerity, and discursive inclusion and equality. Regarding the latter, Dahlberg notes that much of the world's adult population still does not have Internet access due to poverty, poor telecommunications infrastructure and state censorship. Given those limitations, even when access is available, many people do not have the time, cultural capital or community support to engage in online political deliberation. "Given such exclusions," he writes, "the Internet can at best support an elite public sphere."³⁶ He points out that inequalities in who is posting messages demonstrate how cyber-discourse often fails to approximate the requirements of inclusion.

Dahlberg concludes that the Internet is indeed facilitating discourse that replicates the basic structure of rational-critical debate and approximates the requirements of the public sphere. He points out, however, that observations of cyber-discourse also show that the quality of such discourse falls short of the requirements of a public sphere model, stemming in part from the extensive exclusions of some groups in the online forums. He writes that "discursive inequalities and exclusions result from the uneven distribution of power in the wider society, a distribution that is reproduced in online relations. These inequalities may dissipate with time as more women and minorities come online and as the rules of discourse further develop. However, at present, online discourse, including the very rules of discourse themselves, tends to be biased in favor of those individuals and groups that dominate offline discourse."³⁷

Habermas explains that at its basic level, a public sphere emerges not just with the existence of an opinion; an exchange of ideas and opinions must exist. Although Habermas does not specifically address the topic of civility in the context of the exchange of those ideas and opinions, he writes that the discussion must be rational and ethical.³⁸

As Ruiz et al. point out, “His theory tries to enumerate the requirements for rational argumentation based on a moral behavior of participants in a debate.”³⁹ In this way, making an argument rationally, in accordance with reason, logic and civility, is a necessary component for the effectiveness of a public sphere, including the virtual spaces created by online newspapers.

Discursive Civility

Civility in discourse has been examined for its role in facilitating constructive deliberation, including its effect on people’s willingness to consider and adopt another point of view. Hwang examined the psychological process of antagonism in political discussion and explored the extent to which disagreement might lead to acrimonious debate and, when incivility is incorporated, a breakdown in deliberative discussion.⁴⁰ He proposes that discursive incivility induces defensive or hostile reactions instead of deliberative ones. Using a simulated online discussion to experimentally manipulate messages that participants believed they were having with other people around the topic of the withdrawal of U.S. troops in Iraq, Hwang concluded that uncivil expression not only increased moral indignation but also had a detrimental effect on open-mindedness compared to civil expression. In other words, when incivility creeps into the discourse, people begin to harden in their belief and there becomes no room for further debate. Hwang also found that the detrimental effects of discursive incivility were more pronounced when people attacked a viewpoint someone held; it is one thing to merely be uncivil, but for that incivility to be directed at a point of view held by someone is especially counterproductive and may only deepen the antagonism of that person.⁴¹

Other researchers have reached similar conclusions⁴² and warn about the lack of civility in online forums, arguing that free expression and exposure to differing views can hold deliberative potential only when participants act civilly toward each other, including being empathetic, egalitarian and open-minded to different views.⁴³ Dahlberg, for example, questions the usefulness of online discourse in advancing deliberative discussion since many of those in online forums experience a lack of respectful listening to others and minimal commitment to working with differences.⁴⁴ Well before newspapers began allowing comments following news stories, Davis found that online discourse was typically dominated by vigorous attack and humiliation.⁴⁵ “Usenet political discussion tends to favor the loudest and most aggressive individuals,” Davis wrote in 1999. “Those who are less aggressive risk vigorous attack and humiliation.”⁴⁶

In his research, Hwang defines “discursive civility” as arguing the justice of one’s own view while admitting and respecting the justice of others’ views. Conversely, “discursive incivility” is defined as expressing disagreement that denies and disrespects the justice of others’ views.⁴⁷ Brooks and Geer expand on this, explaining that incivility can be defined as attacks that go beyond facts and differences and that delve into name-calling, contempt and derision.⁴⁸

Some scholars argue, however, that while civility may be necessary in order to have a constructive and deliberative debate, so too disagreement and confrontation must exist. Mouffe points out: “A well-functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions. If this is missing, there is the danger that this democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation among other forms of collective identification, as is the case with identity politics,” she writes. “Too much emphasis on

consensus and the refusal of confrontation lead to apathy and disaffection with political participation.”⁴⁹

Incivility, it could be argued, is a natural ingredient of confrontation. Papacharissi argues, however, that too high a standard has been placed on what can and should be considered uncivil discourse. She argues that what might be considered uncivil can actually have a pro-democratic and liberating effect.⁵⁰ When a particular “outgroup” is perceived to be under attack, people who claim membership in that group will find themselves with stronger allegiances to that group. Another way to look at it is that uncivil attacks can have the effect of not convincing people about a different point of view and also further polarizing them by making them shut their mind off to compromise.

Online posters of uncivil sentiments, those who are perceived to be more aggressive and intimidating, are also perceived to be less credible and dishonest, reinforcing the notion that discursive incivility has negative consequences.⁵¹ Ng and Detenber explain that credibility is best established through a thoughtful discussion and that “incivility may be used to mask a lack of factual knowledge, and therefore discussants that are civil would probably be perceived as more credible.”⁵²

At the same time, other research has found that when people are treated with respect and view the decision-making process as just and fair, they are more likely to be open-minded about the debate and even accept other people’s point of view.⁵³ Kingwell summarizes this idea by explaining that civility reduces social friction and enables people who may disagree on a topic to gather, constructively debate and reach rational conclusions.⁵⁴ Herbst points out, “People can be passionate and civil at the same time.”⁵⁵

According to Papacharissi, civility has always been considered a requirement for democratic discourse inasmuch as it is valued as an indicator of a functional democratic society. In her research of 10 Usenet political newsgroups, Papacharissi formulated a three-point index to measure civility. A comment was considered “uncivil” if the commenter verbalized a threat to democracy, assigned stereotypes or threatened other people’s rights. Papacharissi also coded for “impoliteness.” A comment was considered impolite if the comment included, among other things, name-calling, pejorative speak and vulgarities.⁵⁶ Using this approach, Papacharissi found that of the 268 messages posted, most were considered neither impolite nor uncivil. Of the 10 newsgroups, however, one stood out as containing the greatest number of uncivil comments and the third highest number of impolite comments: the one that dealt with immigration.⁵⁷ In the newsgroup, discussants primarily argued over immigration control and policies and tended to stereotype ethnic minorities. Papacharissi concluded that incivility seemed to occur primarily when individuals discussed ethnic groups in derogatory terms and that uncivil messages posed a threat to democracy and thwarted the development of the public sphere. “One could argue that impoliteness is not so bad,” Papacharissi concluded. “It implies emotion, and emotion implies compassion, which in turn implies humanity. It is incivility without a trace of politeness, ‘impeccable incivility,’ that should frighten us.”⁵⁸

Infusing uncivil remarks into a conversation has shown to have other effects. Dahlberg offers some insight as to why some groups might be more apt to fall into a so-called “spiral of silence” while others do not, explaining, for example, that the ability to assert oneself in an online forum is often linked to and extended by offline social hierarchies and identities. “The ability of an individual to assert authority online is

inextricably linked to the extent to which he or she possesses the resources (time, money, and skills) necessary for success in cyberculture.”⁵⁹

Dahlberg explains that the most rudimentary ways some people silence others are through abusive postings aimed at belittling and humiliating them.⁶⁰ Thus abusive discourse is a key way of dominating the dialogue. Such abuse often targets those with less presence online and often coincides with those marginalized in offline discourse, such as non-white ethnic groups.⁶¹ “Such abuse can be extremely upsetting for participants of online proceedings,” Dahlberg writes, “and can lead to their silencing and even withdrawal from cyber-interactions.”⁶²

Making an Argument

In this way, abusive discourse — and the silencing effect it induces — can be seen to hamper constructive communication. Indeed, it is only through all-inclusive participation, researchers have argued, that constructive and effective dialogue — including the opportunity for people to change their mind — can take place. Wojcieszak and Mutz discuss how political conversations, especially those that expose people to different political views, have been widely regarded as beneficial for effective democracy. The logic, they explain, is that if people are confronted with disagreement, they have the benefit of taking others’ views into account and re-evaluating their own opinions. In this way, they are more informed, tolerant and reflective, thus making for a higher quality of opinion.⁶³ When it comes to politics, however, like-minded people primarily drive online forums, which limits the forums’ effectiveness at promoting constructive dialogue. “Although political oriented activities may well be beneficial for some purposes, we find that political chat rooms and message boards make limited

contributions to promoting cross-cutting discourse,” the authors write.⁶⁴ Those discussions, which involve the exchange of different ideas and opinions, are the most beneficial,⁶⁵ while discussions that fail to incorporate a diversity of opinions do not qualify as deliberation.⁶⁶

Researchers have found it useful to explain that a partially homogeneous online discussion space can incorporate at least two types of participation: the majority condition where participants interact mostly with those who are like-minded, such as a friendly opinion climate, and the minority condition, where participants interact mostly with those who do not share their opinion, such as an unwelcoming or hostile climate.⁶⁷ Researchers have found this construct useful in concluding that even if online forums tend to facilitate discussions among like-minded people, it is still possible for some readers to advance their argument even if it did not concur with the majority opinion.⁶⁸

Other researchers have found that those who held the majority opinion were more concerned with reaffirming and bolstering their position, while those who held the minority position were more apt to take a defensive posture in their sentiments of disagreement.⁶⁹ Research has shown that the side people take often depends on their desire to conform. Communication theorists cite the theory of the spiral of silence when trying to explain why people cover up or change their opinions when in a group setting, especially when they think they are alone in their opinions.⁷⁰ The theory holds that people’s tendency to express an opinion in public is usually contingent on the extent to which they are willing to isolate themselves or hold themselves up to scrutiny and, in some cases, ridicule. A reader who sees, for example, that she or he holds a minority opinion might be less willing to stand up and write an unpopular opinion for fear of being

shouted down by those who hold the majority opinion. At the same time, those who hold the majority opinion are emboldened by the idea that they will not be ostracized or vilified for their opinion and are thus more likely to freely express themselves. In this way, a “spiral” occurs both ways: those who hold the minority opinion spiral down into silence while those in the majority opinion spiral up into vocal dominance. This idea has been tested and substantiated by empirical research for various forms of discussion⁷¹ and in online environments as well.⁷² The social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE),⁷³ for example, predicts that in computer-mediated communication groups, the social identity of a group often influences group members’ behavior, including how a person in that group conforms to so-called groupthink, and research has shown that when they are anonymous, group members are strongly influenced by and conform to group norms.⁷⁴ Baker and Petty found that the strength of the message had a greater impact on attitudes when they reflected the majority viewpoint; when the majority used strong arguments, attitudes were more favorable toward their viewpoint, but when the minority made strong arguments, it had no impact on attitudes toward their viewpoint.⁷⁵ Other research reached similar conclusions; attitudes formed following minority messages were more resistant — in fact, unaffected — to a counter-message than attitudes formed following majority messages.⁷⁶

Researchers have also explored whether majority-versus-minority-generated online postings are different in their argument strength and civility and whether the effects of argument strength and civility are different depending on the position that each message took.⁷⁷ A content analysis was conducted on discussion board messages concerning the ethical issues of Korean stem cell research in which majority and minority

positions were readily recognizable. Results showed that those who offered the minority opinion made stronger arguments and offered more civil remarks.⁷⁸

The same way researchers have found identifying the position of an argument — either for or against something — useful in contextualizing oppositional discourse, an examination of the way in which the argument can be persuasive has also proved valuable,⁷⁹ including two distinct, dominant appeal types: emotional appeals and informational appeals.⁸⁰ Persuasive appeals, which employ psychological tactics in an effort to generate feelings, can be, in the broadest sense, construed as emotional appeals. Researchers have noted that emotional appeals have a high degree of persuasive efficacy⁸¹ and are often incorporated into the framework of logical appeals in order to strengthen or alter the effect of the appeal.⁸²

Ray and Batra, in their early research in the use of affective persuasion, proposed that emotional appeals have the potential to persuade in four ways: first, people pay greater attention to affective messages, and for a message to have any effect, it must first be recognized as interesting, which is accomplished with words that have an emotional content; second, affective messages enhance the degree of processing in the receiver of the message since the higher the level of emotion, the higher the level of information acquisition and retention. In essence, the more emotion a message has, the more it resonates; third, because emotion may serve to distract the receiver from the explicit content of the message, leading him or her to uncritically accept the message, invoking emotions in messages may lead to more positive judgments of the message; finally, affective messages may be remembered better since, among other things, they are easy to understand; the receiver internalizes the messages since he or she can process the

message quickly and easily.⁸³ These rationalizations make it easier to understand why, in an online forum, commenters — considering their limited space as well as the ephemeral nature of the forums themselves — are apt to want to make a swift and impressionable impact with their comment and thus predominantly incorporate the use of emotional appeals. As Sproull and Kiesler point out, “As a consequence of the low level of social information in computer-based communication and its perceived ephemerality, people lose their fear of social approbation. Moreover, they imagine they must use stronger language to get their message across.”⁸⁴

Unlike emotional appeals, informational appeals are fact-based, which contextualize an issue by providing factual information. The use of this kind of argument can come in a variety of forms, such as citing news, established facts, issue-to-issue comparisons or statistical research.⁸⁵ In examining the role of argument type, Hoeken and Hustinx found that under certain conditions, statistical evidence is more persuasive than anecdotal evidence in supporting a claim about the probability that something will occur.⁸⁶ If the evidence is part of an argument by generalization, for example, statistical evidence is more persuasive than anecdotal evidence. This conclusion follows argumentation theory, which the authors explain is a scenario in which arguments containing statistical evidence should be stronger than the ones containing anecdotal evidence. Statistics can be seen as hallmarks of objectivity, the authors conclude, and thus act to contribute to a more persuasive argument within the context of an argument by generalization.⁸⁷

Anonymity

Well before newspapers began migrating to the Web en masse in the mid-1990s, online discussion forums, such as those found in Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), bulletin boards and chat rooms, had begun to generate a wide array of scholarly attention in the study of computer-mediated communication (CMC). One of the earliest and most-discussed topics in this area revolves around the topic of anonymity and its use in non-verbal communication.⁸⁸ One of the most popular research approaches is the reduced cues model. The model posits that by removing a person's identity, people are apt to behave and communicate in ways that are otherwise different from the way they would conduct themselves if their identity were intact. Proponents of this model argue that anonymity in CMC is associated with a series of behavioral outcomes that is distinguished from face-to-face communication. These include a propensity for anonymous online users to suspend their consciousness of consequences and thus adopt a sense of being less inhibited in their expressions.⁸⁹ The elimination of identity acts to reduce social context cues. Sproull and Kiesler found that decreasing social context cues had substantial deregulating effects on communication. They also found that much of the information conveyed through email was information that would not have been conveyed through another medium due, in part, to the fact that the communication was asynchronous or non-simultaneous.⁹⁰ "People interacting on a computer are isolated from social cues and feel safe from surveillance and criticism," Sproull and Kiesler write. "This feeling of privacy makes them feel less inhibited with others. It also makes it easy for them to disagree with, confront, or take exception to others' opinions."⁹¹ Perhaps confounding the elements of the spiral of silence, anonymity in CMC was also found to

have an equalizing effect on users; when people made decisions in face-to-face meetings, the high-(academic) status member dominated discussions, but when the same people communicated over email, status and inequalities in participation dissolved. Researchers argued that when group members talk via CMC, they are less aware and less concerned with social distinctions than when they are face-to-face.⁹²

When newspapers began hosting discussion forums on random topics, some editors initially reported being pleased with the comments following news stories, deeming them “high-level” and on-topic. They also considered them to be forums by which dialogue between anonymous readers and journalists could be generated; journalists were able to learn more about issues based on the comments.⁹³ Within a year, however, that tone changed when *The Washington Post* described the growing frustration among journalists and readers at how many of the comments were “raw, racist, sexist and revolting.”⁹⁴ Safety nets were established as a strategy of dealing with the problem, including software that screened for certain words. Over the years, newspapers have adopted ways to reduce — though not eliminate — complete anonymity by requiring that users register their name and email before participating in a forum. The approach seems to have helped increase the quality of the comments. “We did find early in our experience with forums that we were getting a lot of people, as they could hide behind anonymity, saying things that were either sophomoric or hateful, almost as graffiti,” said Kevin McKenna, editorial director of The New York Times Electronic Media Company. “Once we established that you have to register to take part in the forums — that your postings were linked back to something that was traceable... — the quality of the conversation greatly improved.”⁹⁵ The San Jose *Mercury News*, which does not allow anonymous

comments, also anecdotally found that “article commenting becomes more civil when a person is easily identifiable with their name and face attached to a comment.”⁹⁶ In announcing the plan to switch to a new commenting system on its “L.A. Now” blogs, Jimmy Orr, the managing editor in charge of LATimes.com, noted that “by requiring a Facebook registration, it will cut down on the mean-spirited, profane and sometimes useless responses because one’s friends will also see the comments in their newsfeeds.”⁹⁷ Acknowledging the potential of non-anonymous comments to impede spirited debate of online forums, Orr added in his March 2011 post: “Will this move be a ‘troll-killer’ or will it make our blogs seem hollow? We don’t know, but we’re going to give it a shot.”⁹⁸

In general, anonymity can foster a sense of impunity, loss of self-awareness and a likelihood of acting upon normally inhibited impulses and in a way that is markedly inconsistent with a person’s offline self.⁹⁹ In this way, as Hardaker put it, “with the protection of anonymity and distance, CMC users can exercise aggression against other real humans with little risk of being identified or held accountable for their actions.”¹⁰⁰ The most common manifestation of this behavior is known as flaming, which entails sending a vitriolic or abusive message, typically in quick response to another message.¹⁰¹

Singer examined messages in political bulletin boards of Prodigy and America Online during the 1994 campaign season. Of the 669 anonymous messages about a variety of issues related to the election, Singer found that about half were expressions of opinion — people offering their views about candidates, issues and whatever was on their minds.¹⁰² The second most prevalent occurrence, Singer found, was the use of flaming, accounted for in 14% of the messages. In a rare mention in the scholarly literature about an online discussion thread on immigration, Singer found that a Prodigy forum dedicated

to California's Proposition 187, which would cut services to undocumented immigrants, generated one of the most prolonged and heated discussions. About 61% of the messages were judged to be very or somewhat hostile in tone; only 14% were very or somewhat friendly.¹⁰³ Overall, she found, "these boards were not a place for the meek or mild."¹⁰⁴

Media Portrayals of Immigration and Latinos

The idea of the marginality of outsiders is among the chief concerns of critical race theory, which lays the groundwork for understanding many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up. According to Bell, critical race theory sets out to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines.¹⁰⁵ Scholars who subscribe to this theory generally believe that racism in modern society is ordinary, not aberrational, and is commonly experienced by most people of color in this country. The theory also advances the notion that in U.S. society, only the most blatant forms of racism can attract attention because racism in its more subtle forms is so pervasive and part of everyday life that many consider it impractical to try to remedy. One aspect of the theory focuses on how the dominant society racializes minority groups at different times in response to society's shifting needs. During economic downturns, for example, the dominant society will often scapegoat a particular group of people, particularly immigrants, as being blameworthy for the downturn.¹⁰⁶

Drawing on critical race theory, Matsuda et al. discuss the extent to which assaultive speech contributes to maintaining an unjust racial status quo and how it is used in asserting and maintaining the interests of the dominant group.¹⁰⁷ In describing the use of hate speech and the argument that even the most hateful public sentiments are protected under a person's right of free speech, Matsuda argues that the "defenders of the

status quo have discovered, in the First Amendment, a new weapon” and that arguments for absolutist protection of speech often fail to reference any historical context or uneven power relations.¹⁰⁸ The authors describe subjects of hate speech as people who are “daily silenced, intimidated, and subjected to severe psychological and physical trauma by racist assailants who employ words and symbols as part of an integrated arsenal of weapons of oppression and subordination.”¹⁰⁹

Evidence of Latinos as victims of discrimination and subordination has long filled the history books. Today, 50 years after the Chicano Movement sought to bring equal rights and empowerment to Mexican-Americans, oppression and discrimination among many Latinos remains a daily reality. In 2010, more than 6 in 10 Latinos said discrimination was a “major problem” for them.¹¹⁰ The following year, there were an estimated 1,018 hate groups operating in the U.S., a 69% increase since 2000, in part due to anti-Mexican immigrant sentiment.¹¹¹ The Southern Poverty Law Center also noted the rise of Latino discrimination after the passage of HB 56, an immigration bill signed into law in Alabama in June 2011. “Latinos in Alabama have experienced harassment, hardship and discrimination, regardless of their immigration status, as a result of the state’s anti-immigrant law, HB 56, and the xenophobic climate it has created.”¹¹²

Communication scholars describe the intersection of news, race and the status quo and the extent to which the press’ coverage of events are often a reflection of a larger social ferment that supports the dominant social structure. In their examination of how the murder of Emmett Till was covered by different newspapers in 1955, Spratt et al. discuss how news is socially constructed. “News reflects not just what happens but also the context within which it was gathered and processed. Which events are covered (or

not) and how they are covered are influenced by many considerations, including law, economics, culture, and race.”¹¹³

The ways in which Latino immigrants have been portrayed in the news media has been addressed by scholars in examinations of both the explicit forms of bigotry in news coverage to, more recently, the more subtle. Analyzing news coverage of the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, for example, researchers found that newspapers promoted stereotypical images of undocumented immigrants as greedy, lazy and a threat to social stability.¹¹⁴ Santa Ana also examined the way that Latinos were portrayed in metaphors in U.S. public discourse in the last years of the twentieth century. The metaphors, Santa Ana writes, “are not merely rhetorical flourishes, but are the key components with which the public’s concept of Latinos are edified, reinforced, and articulated.”¹¹⁵ He argues that the metaphorical language used to describe Latinos in the *Los Angeles Times* in the 1990s during a wave of anti-Latino politics in California had important implications in shaping public opinions about Latinos.¹¹⁶ Examining articles from the newspaper, Santa Ana found that the dominant metaphors were of immigrants as animals, invaders or other disreputable persons. Latino immigrants were framed, via the subtext of the metaphor used to describe them, as threatening, dangerous, animal-like, an invasion or a disease afflicting the nation. For example, the dangerous-water metaphor was commonly used. Latino immigrants’ arrival to the U.S. was framed as being a “flood” a “wave,” a “tsunami,” or a “sea of brown faces.” California was seen to be “drowning” in the “rising tide” or an “inexorable flow” of immigrants. These dangerous waters were framed as being “relentless” or “overwhelming.” The war metaphor framed Latino immigrants as part of an “invasion” or a “takeover” of the U.S. or described states

as being “under siege.” Undocumented immigrants were framed as inhuman when reporters wrote of “ferreting out” the “alien invasion” or of “curbing” immigration. The result was an era of reinforcement of a negative view of immigrants and the erasure of their individuality and humanity.¹¹⁷

Santa Ana’s work is substantially grounded in the work of George Kakoff and his work on cognitive metaphor theory. Kakoff argues that the use of metaphor is an especially salient way for messages to be received by readers since people do not principally make sense of their surroundings in terms of linear thinking and logical syllogism. Instead, image formation is a central process of human thought, and humans build their concepts of the world in terms of images, and in text, this function is expressed via metaphor.¹¹⁸ Describing an immigrant as a “locust” or a “cockroach” thus takes on a new resonance; not merely a dehumanizing metaphor, the image it conjures is especially pernicious for its salience in the minds of readers. Such figurative language, which portrays immigrants as threatening to Americans, becomes internalized as a conceptual image of *all* Latinos. “Metaphor in discourse,” Santa Ana writes, “is a window on the ways that Americans frame their domestic worldview, and on their underlying political and social values.”¹¹⁹ Summarizing his research, Santa Ana explained that the public discourse that followed a decade of anti-Latino laws “reaffirmed conventional views of the American nation. The message articulated the traditional relationship that Mexicans (and by extension, other Latinos) had to the body politic. In coarse terms, the public was reminded to put Mexicans in their place.”¹²⁰

Chavez also discusses the portrayal of Latinos in the context of immigration in an exploration of anti-immigrant sentiments found on the covers of popular magazines and

the ways in which such images play a powerful role in shaping the national discourse. He notes that immigration has long been a topic of national interest and “immigrants are newcomers whose difference and ‘otherness’ do not go unquestioned or unremarked upon. Their very presence raises concerns about population growth, economic competition, and various linguistic and ‘cultural’ threats. These polarized views constitute the immigration dilemma in American society.”¹²¹ Like Santa Ana, Chavez concludes that “Mexican immigration has been represented almost entirely in alarmist imagery” in magazine covers in three decades following the mid-1970s. “Metaphors of conflict and impending disaster — crisis, bombs, invasions — have consistently filled the visual discourse of the magazine covers,” Chavez writes. “When Mexican immigrants are visually represented, they appear in ways that stress their backwardness, peasantness, and lack of modern sophistication.”¹²²

Coverage of immigration on network news in 2005, other researchers found, was largely framed with the notion that immigrants, mostly undocumented, were changing communities across the U.S. The stories, the authors found, were often told from the perspective of the community residents rather from the perspective of the immigrants.¹²³ When immigrants are depicted, they are often in the form of stereotypical images, including as coming to the United States to take jobs or drain communities of their resources. “Images of day laborers standing in a parking lot or immigrants crossing the border often provide viewers with a negative, menacing and stereotypical depiction of Latinos,” the authors wrote.¹²⁴

Chavez points out that the media have played a significant role in perpetuating what he calls the Latino threat narrative, which paints Latinos as “unwilling or incapable

of integrating, of becoming part of the national community. Rather, they are part of an invading force south of the border that is bent on reconquering land that was formerly theirs (the U.S. Southwest) and destroying the American way of life.”¹²⁵ Chavez writes that the Latino threat narrative, perpetuated by the media, begins to become common and acceptable, thus fitting into the framework of critical race theory. “The Latino Threat Narrative is pervasive even when not explicitly mentioned. It is the cultural dark matter filling space with taken-for-granted ‘truths’ in debates over immigration on radio and TV talk shows, in newspaper editorials, and on Internet blogs.”¹²⁶ Indeed, Chavez argues, the Latino threat narrative can be found in almost any discussion of immigration in contemporary public discourse and that the media help construct the imagined community of immigrants through representations of both inclusion and exclusion. “Through its coverage of events, the media produce knowledge about, and help construct, those considered legitimate members of society as well as those viewed as less legitimate, marginalized, and stigmatized Others.”¹²⁷

Several researchers have applied these ideas to the coverage of Latinos and Latinos issues, including immigration. Analyzing news coverage of undocumented immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American nations across different news media from 1997 to 2006, researchers asked how the media present the question of why undocumented immigrants are a problem and the extent to which negative consequences appeared more often than others. They found that in two media, television and newspapers, crime was mentioned most often as a negative consequence of immigration. Newspaper stories in border states (California and Texas) were also more likely than newspaper stories from elsewhere to discuss the negative consequences of immigration,

including issues of crime and social costs. The authors pointed out that news organizations are for-profit organizations and are compelled to cover stories in such a way as to attract a large audience, thus it was not surprising that the media were most likely to refer to crime when addressing the negative consequences of immigration. “Linking illegal immigration to a crime story must be a preferred way of talking about the issues,” they wrote, “because it will necessarily involve drama, conflict, good, and evil, the ingredients to attract a large audience.”¹²⁸

In their examination of news coverage of Latino immigration in California, Branton and Dunaway also found that news organizations closer to the border not only tended to offer more frequent coverage of Latino immigration than media organizations farther removed but were also much more prone to highlight the negative aspects of immigration.¹²⁹ Looking at 47 newspapers in California, the authors argue that the pressure for local coverage along with the economically motivated tendency toward sensationalism in highlighting conflict, news organizations offered a disproportional amount of coverage of the negative attributes of issues surrounding immigration, including issues of drugs, crime, human trafficking and trespassing. In this way, existing perceptions of the negative aspects of immigration held by people living near the border were exacerbated by a heightened salience of the issues. Branton and Dunaway write that “by highlighting the negative aspects associated with immigration and Latino immigration, local media outlets increase the salience of these negative aspects in the minds of citizens and, by doing so, influence their evaluation of the issue of immigration as a whole.”¹³⁰

Research has specifically addressed this idea. Analyzing the news coverage of a fatal drunk-driving accident, Stewart, Pitts and Osborne found that *The Virginian-Pilot* was apt to repeatedly highlight in their news coverage that the suspect was an undocumented immigrant.¹³¹ After the man, originally from Mexico and with a previous arrest record, killed two white teenage girls in the accident, the newspaper framed the coverage as a cautionary tale about the dangers of undocumented immigrants, not of drinking and driving. National news organizations picked up on the story and followed the same frame. Soon, conservative Fox News pundit Bill O'Reilly called the Virginia Beach community a "sanctuary city" for undocumented immigrants and spent weeks railing against "immigration madness."¹³² Other newspaper articles followed, including pieces connecting undocumented immigrants to criminal activity.

The results, the authors argue, was the perpetuation of the Latino threat narrative in a mostly non-Latino community. Their analysis "shows some of the ways that media discourse can shape real and perceived intergroup threats, both how members of the majority in-group may come to feel threatened by a relatively new out-group as well as how members of the minority out-group are threatened by messages promulgated by the dominant majority group."¹³³

Other researchers have found that such news framing does not rest in the provenance of small-town newspapers. Carter, Thomas and Ross examined *The New York Times'* coverage of the May 2006 immigration debates and found that news stories privileged the perspectives of the political elites and reinforced polarized notions of national identity.¹³⁴ The authors found that news reports constructed the border as a site of conflict and contestation, used stereotyped imagery and coded language to

dichotomize U.S. and Mexican identities and portray the bilateral relationship in distinctly hierarchical terms. The otherwise peaceful U.S.-Mexico border, for example, was often described as a site of conflict and contestation: as a military combat zone, a Wild West frontier or as a desert wasteland where desperate, alien refugees made perilous journeys from their miserable Mexican dystopia in search of rewards in a U.S. utopia. “Coverage created a ‘discursive wall’ between Us and Them, with the border representing a line of demarcation that defined who belonged and who did not,” the authors wrote. “Mexican identity was rarely understood on its own terms but was constructed as the foil for crucial elements of U.S. national identity.”¹³⁵

In summation, the mass media — and particularly, the news media — have historically played a significant role in constructing an image of the Latino immigrant. Mainstream newspapers as a mass media institution have contributed to this construction in the content they provide, both text and images by journalists and, with the advent of new technologies, in the reader-generated content they publish online. While reader comments are not part of news coverage, they are nevertheless a ubiquitous part of the content that newspapers now provide. Their content, while sparsely explored in the scholarly literature, represents a potential new way the news media reproduce and perpetuate a withering image of the Latino immigrant. The ways the news media construct derogatory depictions of Latinos matter because people often get their cues on how to consider a particular subject from the news media.¹³⁶

Hypotheses and Research Questions

In a new era of participatory journalism, newspapers are serving an instrumental role in establishing a new public sphere with the advent of online reader comment

forums. By doing this, newspapers are hoping to expand on their democracy-enabling role by providing the public a virtual public space to discuss the pressing issues of the day. Potentially incendiary topics, such as immigration, however, have created a dilemma for online newspapers at a time when the immigration debate has again risen to the fore. Anecdotal evidence from newspaper journalists of the pervasive incivility in online reader comments following news on immigration offers an excellent opportunity to explore a new phenomenon that critical race theory might help explain.

Such explorations of race and the discursive incivility that often accompanies it, however, also raise questions about the tension between critical race theory and a new public sphere that newspapers have created and whether the democracy-enabling forums paradoxically discriminate against Latinos and subvert the democratic rights of an already marginalized group. Anonymity is key in a discussion about online reader comments, whether acting in a democratizing and equalizing function or serving as the linchpin upon which incivility relies.

Considering the research that has demonstrated that discursive incivility serves little effect other than to contribute to the breakdown of deliberative discussion as well as the idea that conversation participants are apt to weigh in with different types of arguments based on where their argument falls — either in the majority or minority position — the following hypotheses and research questions are posed:

Part I – Anonymous Immigration

H1: Online newspaper discussion boards that follow news about immigration and that allow anonymity:

- contain mostly comments by those who support tough immigration laws and

- who express themselves with emotionally laden
- and uncivil comments
- directed at Latinos.

Part II — Anonymous Tea Party

RQ1: What was the position of anonymous commenters (for or against) about the Tea Party movement?

RQ2: What was the level of civility in anonymous comments following news about the Tea Party movement?

RQ3: Is there a difference in the civility between anonymous commenters who were for the Tea Party movement or against it?

RQ4: Is there a difference in the argument type among anonymous commenters who were for the Tea Party movement or against it?

RQ5: Is there a difference in the civility of the anonymous comment about the Tea Party movement given the type of argument used?

Part III — Non-Anonymous Immigration

H2: Online newspaper discussion boards that follow news about immigration and that disallow anonymity:

- contain mostly comments by those who support tough immigration laws and
- who express themselves with emotionally laden
- yet civil comments
- directed at Latinos.

Part IV — Comparisons

H3: Anonymous comments following news about immigration will be more uncivil than comments following stories about the Tea Party movement.

H4: Non-anonymous comments will be more civil than anonymous comments in discussion forums following news about immigration.

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CHAPTER III

METHODS

For this quantitative content analysis, a random sample of comments was analyzed using the comment as the unit of analysis.

The first area of this research examines comments in the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Arizona Republic* and the *Houston Chronicle* following news items about immigration, particularly SB 1070. U.S. federal law already requires certain immigrants to register with the U.S. government and to have registration documents in their possession. SB 1070 additionally makes it a state misdemeanor for an immigrant to be in Arizona without the required documents. It also allows police broad power to stop and detain people on the suspicion of being in the country without documents. As of March 2010, 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants were living in the U.S., a figure virtually unchanged from a year earlier.¹³⁷

In a second area, a comparison is made with the comments following news items about the Tea Party movement in the same three newspapers. Established in 2009, the Tea Party is an antigovernment, grass-roots political movement that has endorsed Republican candidates and is composed primarily of those who consider themselves Republican. The movement endorses reduced spending, reduction in the national debt and opposition to taxation.

In a third area, a comparison is made on the topic of immigration with online newspapers that allow anonymity in their commenting forums with newspapers that disallow it.

Part I — Anonymous Immigration

Online newspaper comments were collected from the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Arizona Republic* and the *Houston Chronicle*. The newspapers were chosen because they are the largest newspapers in three border states that serve readers who are most likely to be affected by issues of immigration (In 2010, California and Texas had the greatest numbers of undocumented Latino immigrants; Arizona ranked eighth in the nation in undocumented immigrants¹³⁸ and was the state that introduced SB 1070) and thus those most likely to have an opinion on the topic. Research has also shown that news organizations closer to the U.S.-Mexico border tend to generate a higher volume of news articles about Latino immigration.¹³⁹

Stories and columns that dealt with immigration, particularly Arizona's SB 1070, were chosen from each newspaper between April and November 2010 (see Appendix D). The stories and comments that followed that were selected for analysis were about Mexican immigration and, more specifically, undocumented immigration. Issues surrounding news coverage of the impact of undocumented immigration included protests, legislation, reform, rallies, crime, population, boycotts and the lives of migrants, including issues of jobs, profiling and deportations. In all, 7,539 comments were collected from three newspapers (about 2,500 each) from 35 news stories, columns and blogs. Each comment was numbered sequentially, and a random number generator chose the numbers for 450 comments, about 150 comments from each newspaper. After a process of refining categories and clarifying definitions during pretests, coders were trained with detailed definitions for each category (see examples in Appendix A). Three coders coded the same 10% of the total sample, answering several questions per

comment, and reached significant agreement in each category (Krippendorff's alpha (α) $\geq .80$) (see Table 1). Coders then coded the entire sample of 450 comments.¹⁴⁰

TABLE 1
Intercoder Reliability Coefficients
Anonymous Immigration

Coding category	Krippendorff's alpha (α)
Position	.81
Latino/a addressed	.81
Civility	.80
Argument type	.80

In measuring the commenters' position, coders were asked to determine where the commenter stood on the issue of immigration in the context of Arizona's SB 1070 (see Question 1, Appendix A). Coders were asked to differentiate if the commenters were "pro-SB 1070," "anti-SB 1070," "neutral," or "unclear" in their position. Coders were instructed to read the whole comment before making a determination and that while many commenters did not explicitly state that they were for or against the bill, they should still interpret as best they could what side the commenter was on.

A second question asked coders if the commenter mentioned Latinos or Latin Americans. The coders were instructed that the commenter did not have to use a specific term to describe Latinos or Latin Americans (see Question 2, Appendix A). If the commenter used the pronouns, "they" or "them," and the coder understood it to be in the context of describing Latinos or Latin Americans, then the comment was to be coded as mentioning a Latino or Latin American.

Coming up with a widely applicable and effective civility scale that has agreed-upon definitions has remained elusive to researchers who have taken up the topic of coding for civility.¹⁴¹ This research relies on scales other researchers have used as well as

the newspapers' own rules to guide how civility is measured. Generally, according to their own policies, these newspapers ask readers to remain civil and refrain from personal attacks. For example, in explaining the rules governing their online comment boards, the *Los Angeles Times* reminds readers to “write in a common language that steers clear of personal attacks and/or vulgarities.” It says that infractions include “abusive, off-topic or foul language; racist, sexist, homophobic or other offensive terminology.” It also tells readers not to post a comment that “contains vulgar, profane, abusive, racist or hateful language or expressions, epithets or slurs, text, photographs or illustrations in poor taste, inflammatory attacks of a personal, racial or religious nature.”¹⁴²

The Arizona Republic tells readers that “profanity or personal attacks or other inappropriate comments or material are not acceptable.” The paper also notes that “comments that include ethnic slurs and/or epithets, sexist language or religious bigotry are not acceptable.” Finally, “comments should be civil and free of threats.”¹⁴³

The *Houston Chronicle* tells readers that they should not post comments that “are fraudulent, unlawful, threatening, abusive, harassing, libelous, defamatory, obscene, vulgar, offensive, pornographic, profane, sexually explicit or indecent, or that threaten or invite violence, or that are derogatory of others on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual preference or disability.”¹⁴⁴

While the standards differ slightly, all three newspapers essentially ask readers to remain civil in their remarks and refrain from ethnically and racially insensitive or hateful sentiments. Civility was thus measured on a three-point scale (see Question 3, Appendix A). A comment was considered uncivil if it had at least one of the following: personal or inflammatory attacks, threats, vulgarities, abusive or foul language, xenophobic or other

hateful language or expressions, epithets or ethnic slurs, sentiments that are racist or bigoted, disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity or that assign stereotypes.

A comment was considered civil if the comment had none of the “uncivil” characteristics. This kind of comment was defined as being rational, well reasoned and free of any insults. To be coded in this section, the comment had to be respectful, courteous and considerate. Coders were instructed that discursive civility may be defined as “behavior arguing the justice of one’s own views and at the same time admitting and respecting the justice of others’ views”¹⁴⁵ and that is polite and tolerant.¹⁴⁶

A third category was considered “neither/nor” to classify comments that were deemed neither especially uncivil nor especially civil. To be in this category, the comment did not have any of the “uncivil” characteristics. Still, the comment could be spirited and forceful. It could contain scorn or ridicule or express derision or disapproval. The comment fell into this category if it made a coarse or crude argument without resorting to hateful language. Finally, a fourth category allowed coders to categorize those comments in which a tone could not be determined.

If the comment was coded as “uncivil,” coders were further asked to specify why the comment was coded as such. Given a list of nine possible reasons a comment was coded as “uncivil,” including name calling, threats, vulgarities, abusive or foul language, xenophobia, epithets or slurs, racist or bigoted sentiments, and use of stereotypes, coders were asked to check all that apply (see Question 3.2, Appendix A). These subcategories were taken from language that online newspapers use in their description of the rules of the discussion forums and examples of the things not allowed. Coders were instructed to note all applicable categories, even if they appeared to overlap.

Finally, a fourth question asked coders to determine the type of argument the commenter used (see Question 4, Appendix A). A comment was considered “informational” if the comment had fact-based appeals that contextualized an issue by supplying information relating to the topic at hand. To qualify as “informational,” the comment had to be empirical — based on data or verifiable by observation or experience. A comment was considered “emotional” if it appealed to non-factual arguments and employed psychological tactics in attempting to generate an emotional response. A third category accounted for the possibility that the comment contained both “informational” and “emotional” approaches.

Part II — Anonymous Tea Party

The second part of this research mirrors the first part inasmuch as definitions about argument position, civility and argument type remain the same. The Tea Party was chosen because it represents a news topic that has been extensively covered and that also has generated heated debate on two opposing sides, chiefly along partisan lines. While the topic has engendered dynamic discussion in online newspaper reader comment forums in the same manner as immigration stories, it is a topic that, unlike immigration, does not directly deal with matters of race and ethnicity. Thus, the goal was to choose a controversial topic with no direct link to issues of race and compare it to a topic that does in order to examine whether people are more likely to register uncivil comments when the topic involves issues of race. Comments were collected from the same newspapers, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Arizona Republic* and the *Houston Chronicle*. Stories and columns that dealt with the Tea Party movement were chosen from each newspaper, between March 2010 and July 2011 (see Appendix E). In all, 7,567 comments were

collected from three newspapers (about 2,500 each) from 23 news stories, columns and blogs. Each comment was numbered sequentially, and a random number generator chose the numbers for 450 comments, about 150 comments from each newspaper. After a process of refining categories and clarifying definitions during pretests, coders were trained with detailed definitions for each category (see examples in Appendix B). Three coders coded the same 10% of the total sample, answering several questions per comment, and reached significant agreement in each category (Krippendorff's alpha (α) $\geq .81$) (see Table 2). Coders then coded the entire sample of 450 comments.¹⁴⁷

TABLE 2
Intercoder Reliability Coefficients
Anonymous Tea Party

Coding category	Krippendorff's alpha (α)
Position	.82
Civility	.81
Argument type	.83

As before, coders were first asked about the position of the commenter (see Question 1, Appendix B). If the commenter felt the comment favored the movement or expressed conservative ideas that usually align with the Tea Party movement, the coder marked the comment as "1." If the coder felt the comment opposed the movement, the coder marked the comment as "2." Coders were also given options if the comment appeared "neutral" or "can't be determined."

Second, and as before, civility was measured on a three-point scale (see Question 2, Appendix B). A comment was considered uncivil if it had at least one of the following: personal or inflammatory attacks, name-calling, threats, vulgarities, abusive or foul

language, hateful language or expressions, including epithets, slurs, and sentiments that are bigoted or that assign stereotypes.

Similarly, a comment was considered civil if the comment had none of the “uncivil” characteristics. This kind of comment was defined as being rational, well reasoned and free of any insults. To be coded in this section, the comment had to be respectful, courteous and considerate. A third category was considered “neither/nor” to classify comments that were deemed neither especially uncivil nor especially civil. To be in this category, the comment could not have any of the “uncivil” characteristics. Still, the comment could be spirited and forceful, contain scorn, ridicule or expresses derision or disapproval. Finally, a fourth category allowed coders to categorize those comments in which a tone could not be determined.

As with the coding for comments for immigration, if the comment was coded as “uncivil,” coders were further asked to specify why the comment was coded as such. Given a list of nine possible reasons a comment was coded as “uncivil,” coders were asked to check all that apply (see Question 2.2, Appendix B).

Coders were also asked to determine the type of argument the commenter used (see Question 3, Appendix B). A comment was considered “informational” if the comment had fact-based appeals that contextualized an issue by supplying factual information relating to the topic at hand. A comment was considered “emotional” if it appealed to non-factual arguments and employed psychological tactics in attempting to generate an emotional response. As with the coding for the immigration comments, a third category accounted for the possibility that the comment contained both “informational” and “emotional” approaches.

Part III — Non-Anonymous Immigration

A third area seeks to test the claim by some newspapers that removing anonymity in discussion forums will stimulate civil, constructive dialogue. Comparing the tone of anonymous comments following news items about immigration with non-anonymous comments on the same topic will help elucidate the extent to which anonymous online commenters are more likely to register uncivil comments than non-anonymous commenters. Comments were collected from 11 newspapers — *The Buffalo Daily News*, the *Statesman Journal* (Salem, OR), the *Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, VT), *USA Today*, the *Detroit Free Press*, *The Indianapolis Star*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, the *El Paso Times*, the *Hartford Courant*, *The Wall Street Journal* and certain blogs from the *Los Angeles Times*. Except for *The Wall Street Journal*, these newspapers require forum participants to register their real name by signing on with a Facebook account. The third part of this research mirrors the first and second part inasmuch as definitions about argument position, civility and argument type remain the same (see Appendix C).

These newspapers were chosen because they are among the few in the country that have disallowed anonymity on their online commenting forums. *The Wall Street Journal*, it should be noted, is somewhat different from the regional newspapers analyzed because it is a national newspaper that primarily focuses on business news and that also requires its online readers to subscribe to the online version. Despite the differences and considering the few newspapers that have disallowed anonymity, incorporating the *Wall Street Journal* in this research was deemed appropriate.

The newspapers have similar forums rules as the *Times*, the *Republic* and the *Chronicle*, pertaining to civility in the comments. For example, the *San Jose Mercury*

News tells readers that “any information or materials that are unlawful, threatening, abusive, libelous, defamatory, obscene, vulgar, pornographic, profane, indecent or otherwise objectionable to us in our sole discretion” is prohibited.¹⁴⁸

The Wall Street Journal, which requires commenters to register with their real first and last name before participating in the comment forums, tells readers, “You must demonstrate appropriate respect for other members. If you disagree with an opinion, feel free to challenge that opinion with a posting of your own. You must not personally attack any other member.” Further, the newspaper tells readers: “You will not upload, post or submit anything that is obscene or contains profanity or that may be hateful or offensive on racial, ethnic, sexual or any other grounds; is harmful, vulgar or distasteful; or is defamatory, libelous, or invades another person’s privacy or proprietary rights.”¹⁴⁹

News stories, columns and blogs that dealt with immigration were chosen from each newspaper from May 2011 to Feb. 2012 (see Appendix F). In all, 7,736 comments were collected from 11 newspapers from 137 news items. Each comment was numbered sequentially, and a random number generator chose the numbers for 450 comments. Because comments were much less prevalent in the discussion boards of the smaller newspapers, fewer comments were available for collection and analysis. Further, for a more apt comparison of border state newspapers, a stratified random sample was used; more comments were collected from the California newspapers (100 from each) and the Texas newspaper (100). In all, 300 comments were collected from the *Los Angeles Times* blogs,¹⁵⁰ the *San Jose Mercury News* and the *El Paso Times*.¹⁵¹ Stories, columns and blogs on the topic of immigration were conducted with a keyword search of the word, “immigration,” via a search engine embedded in each individual newspaper. Stories,

columns and blogs were chosen from the first 10-30 pages¹⁵² of search results; as previously mentioned, the number of comments from each newspaper varied.¹⁵³ Of the comments from the remaining eight newspapers, 15% were gathered from each newspaper for the sample, making up a total of 150 comments.¹⁵⁴ While a comparison of anonymous and non-anonymous comments from the same newspaper or even among newspapers in the same three border states would be ideal, the current policies of non-anonymity in newspaper commenting forums largely prohibit this. For example, it does not appear that any large or mid-size newspapers in Arizona allow for non-anonymous commenting. For these reasons, oversampling of comments among the newspapers in border states and undersampling of comments in non-border states appeared justified. After a process of refining categories and clarifying definitions during pretests, coders were trained with detailed definitions for each category (see examples in Appendix C). Three coders coded the same 10% of the total sample, answering several questions per comment, and reached significant agreement in each category (Krippendorff's alpha (α) $\geq .83$) (see Table 3). Coders then coded the entire sample of 450 comments.¹⁵⁵

TABLE 3
Intercoder Reliability Coefficients
Non-Anonymous Immigration

Coding category	Krippendorff's alpha (α)
Position	.84
Latino/a addressed	.86
Civility	.83
Argument type	.84

Notes

¹³⁷ Jeffrey Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States," *Pew Hispanic Center*, April 14, 2009, <<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/04/14/a-portrait-of-unauthorized-immigrants-in-the-united-states/>>.

¹³⁸ Jeffrey Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010," *Pew Hispanic Center*, Feb. 1, 2011, <<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/02/01/unauthorized-immigrant-population-national-and-state-trends-2010/>>.

¹³⁹ Branton and Dunaway, "Spatial Proximity to the U.S.-Mexico Border and Newspaper Coverage of Immigration Issues."

¹⁴⁰ Each coder, one Latino and two white, coded a separate set of 150 comments each.

¹⁴¹ Papacharissi, "Democracy Online: Civility, Politeness, and the Democratic Potential of Online Political Discussion Groups."

¹⁴² "Terms of Service," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed May 8, 2012, <<http://www.latimes.com/services/site/lat-terms,0,6713384.story>>.

¹⁴³ "AZCentral.com Rules of Engagement," *The Arizona Republic*, accessed May 8, 2012, <<http://www.azcentral.com/help/articles/info-rulesofengagement.html>>.

¹⁴⁴ "Web site terms and conditions," *Houston Chronicle*, accessed May 8, 2012, <<http://www.chron.com/terms.html>>.

¹⁴⁵ Hwang, "Why Does Incivility Matter When Communicating Disagreement?: Examining the Psychological Process of Antagonism in Political Discussion," 20.

¹⁴⁶ Kingwell, *A Civil Tongue: Justice, Dialogue, and the Politics of Pluralism*.; Kim et al., "Disagreeing with Others as a Minority: Argument Strength, Civility, and Their Impacts on Response Favorability in Online Discussion."

¹⁴⁷ Each coder, one Latino and two white, coded a separate set of 150 comments each.

¹⁴⁸ "Forum Rules," *The Mercury News*, accessed May 8, 2012, <http://forums.mercurynews.com/rules/mn_rules.html>.

¹⁴⁹ "Journal Community," *The Wall Street Journal*, accessed May 8, 2012, <<http://online.wsj.com/community/faq>>.

¹⁵⁰ In May 2011, *The Los Angeles Times* switched to a new commenting system. The new system required that commenters on some of their more active blogs sign in using their

Facebook account. (See Jimmy Orr, “Testing a new system for online comments,” March 15, 2011, <<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/readers/2011/03/testing-a-new-system-for-online-comments.html>>).

¹⁵¹ Among the following three newspapers, 300 total comments were collected: *San Jose Mercury News*, 757 collected, 100 coded; *Los Angeles Times* blogs, 1,594 collected, 100 coded; *El Paso Times*, 202 collected, 100 coded.

¹⁵² The number of page results varied from newspaper to newspaper. For example, many Gannett newspapers make their news stories available for only 30 days before they are archived, limiting the number of comments that could be captured.

¹⁵³ For the sake of time and efficiency, not all comments were collected from all stories about immigration.

¹⁵⁴ Among the following eight newspapers, 150 total comments were collected, about 15 percent from each newspaper: *Wall Street Journal*, 2,583 comments collected, 50 coded; *The Buffalo Daily News*, 48 collected, 7 coded; *Statesman Journal* (Salem, OR), 57 collected, 8 coded; *Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, VT), 45 collected, 7 coded; *Hartford Courant*, 68 collected, 10 coded; *Detroit Free Press*, 86 collected, 13 coded; *The Indianapolis Star*, 32 collected, 5 coded; *USA Today*, 2,264 collected, 50 coded.

¹⁵⁵ Each coder, one Latino and two white, coded a separate set of 150 comments.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Part I — Anonymous Immigration

The first hypothesis predicted that online newspaper discussion boards that follow news about immigration and that allow anonymity contain mostly comments by those who support tough immigration laws and who express themselves with emotionally laden, uncivil comments directed at Latinos.

Among the sample of 450 comments, a majority of commenters (66.2%) supported the Arizona legislation. The position of 16.4% of the comments was against the legislation. The position of 17.3% of the comments was either neutral or unclear. Among the comments, Latinos as a group or a Latino/a as an individual were addressed or invoked in 69.5% of the comments, while 30.4% made no such mention.

In comments following stories about immigration, just over half (53.3%) were uncivil. Notably fewer (31.8%) were either unclear or neither especially uncivil nor especially civil (Because of low cell counts, comments that were coded as “unclear” and “neither/nor” were combined for this analysis and all subsequent analyses), and 14.9% of the comments were civil (see Table 4).

TABLE 4

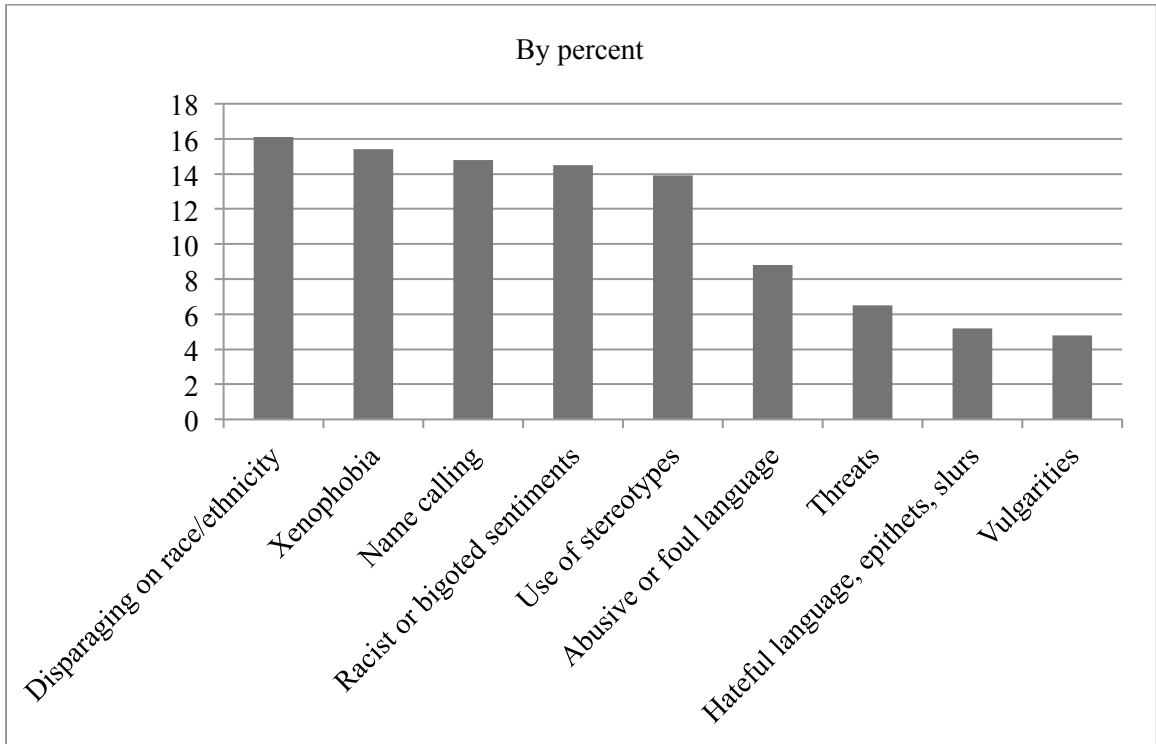
Comment Position and Civility Crosstabulation						
			Civility			Total
			Uncivil	Neither/nor -Unclear	Civil	
Position	Pro-SB 1070	Count	191	79	28	298
		% within Position	64.1%	26.5%	9.4%	100%
		% of Total	42.4%	17.6%	6.2%	66.2%
	Anti-SB 1070	Count	20	31	23	74
		% within Position	27%	41.9%	31.1%	100%
		% of Total	4.4%	6.9%	5.1%	16.4%
	Neutral/Unclear	Count	29	33	16	78
		% within Position	37.2%	42.3%	20.5%	100%
		% of Total	6.4%	7.3%	3.6%	17.3%
Total		Count	240	143	67	450
		% within Position	53.3%	31.8%	14.9%	100%
		% of Total	53.3%	31.8%	14.9%	100%

Commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were in favor of Arizona's immigration law were significantly more likely to express themselves with uncivil comments ($\chi^2(4) = 48.3, p < .001$). Of the 298 comments that favored the legislation, 64.1% were uncivil, 26.5% were either unclear or neither especially uncivil nor civil, and 9.4% were civil. Those commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were against the legislation were much less likely to express themselves with uncivil comments. Of the 74 comments that opposed the legislation, 27% were uncivil, 41.9% were unclear or neither especially uncivil nor especially civil, and 31.1% were civil (see Table 4).

The most common vehicles for the expression of incivility in this area were comments that invoked disparaging sentiments on the basis of race/ethnicity (16.1%), xenophobia (15.4%), name-calling (14.8%), racist or bigoted sentiments (14.5%), and the use of stereotypes (13.9%) (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
Anonymous Immigration Incivility By Type

Category	Frequency	Percent
Disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity	155	16.1
Xenophobia	149	15.4
Name calling	143	14.8
Racist or bigoted sentiments	140	14.5
Use of stereotypes	134	13.9
Abusive or foul language	85	8.8
Threats	63	6.5
Hateful language, epithets, slurs	50	5.2
Vulgarity	46	4.8
Total	965	100



The vast majority of commenters (92.4%) made emotional appeals in their comments. Very few (3.3%) incorporated the use of facts and figures, and a small number (4.2%) used both (see Table 6).

TABLE 6

Comment Position and Argument Type Crosstabulation						
			Argument type			Total
			Informational	Emotional	Both	
Position	Pro-SB 1070	Count	8	287	3	298
		% within Position	2.7%	96.3%	1%	100%
		% of Total	1.8%	63.8%	.7%	66.2%
	Anti-SB 1070	Count	6	57	11	74
		% within Position	8.1%	77%	14.9%	100%
		% of Total	1.3%	12.7%	2.4%	16.4%
	Neutral/ Unclear	Count	1	72	5	78
		% within Position	1.3%	92.3%	6.4%	100%
		% of Total	.2%	16%	1.1%	17.3%
Total		Count	15	416	19	450
		% within Position	3.3%	92.4%	4.2%	100%
		% of Total	3.3%	92.4%	4.2%	100%

The majority of those commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were in favor of Arizona's immigration law were significantly more likely to express themselves with an emotional appeal ($\chi^2(4) = 36.8, p = < .001$). Though there was a significant difference between the variables, four cells (44.4%) had an expected count less than five. Even though the vast majority of comments used emotional appeals, there was a distinction between the commenters who were for or against the bill. Of the 298 comments that favored the legislation, 96.3% expressed themselves using an emotional appeal, while of the 74 people who opposed the bill, 77% used an emotional appeal (see Table 6).

Finally, commenters who expressed themselves with an emotional appeal usually did so with an uncivil sentiment ($\chi^2(4) = 47.4, p < .001$). Though there was a significant difference between the variables, three cells (33.3%) had an expected count less than five because there were very few instances of certain categories, thus the finding should be interpreted with caution. Of the 416 comments that incorporated emotional appeals, 57% were uncivil, 31% were either unclear or neither especially civil nor especially uncivil and 12% were civil (see Table 7).

TABLE 7

Argument Type and Civility Crosstabulation						
			Civility			Total
			Uncivil	Neither/nor- Unclear	Civil	
Argument type	Informational	Count	1	5	9	15
		% within Type	6.7%	33.3%	60%	100%
		% of Total	.2%	1.1%	2%	3.3%
	Emotional	Count	237	129	50	416
		% within Type	57%	31%	12%	100%
		% of Total	52.7%	28.7%	11.1%	92.4%
	Both	Count	2	9	8	19
		% within Type	10.5%	47.4%	42.1%	100%
		% of Total	.4%	2%	1.8%	4.2%
Total		Count	240	143	67	450
		% within Type	53.3%	31.8%	14.9%	100%
		% of Total	53.3%	31.8%	14.9%	100%

Thus, the four elements of H1 were supported.

Part II — Anonymous Tea Party

RQ1 sought to discern the anonymous majority and minority opinion about the Tea Party movement in newspaper comment boards. Among the sample of 450 comments, the greatest percentage (36.9%) did not support the Tea Party movement. Slightly fewer (29.6%) expressed sentiments that were in favor of the movement. The position of 33.6% of the commenters was unclear or neutral (see Table 8).

TABLE 8

Comment Position and Civility Crosstabulation						
			Civility			Total
			Uncivil	Neither/nor-Unclear	Civil	
Position	Pro-Tea Party	Count	55	43	35	133
		% within Position	41.4%	32.3%	26.3%	100%
		% of Total	12.2%	9.6%	7.8%	29.6%
	Anti-Tea Party	Count	58	53	55	166
		% within Position	34.9%	31.9%	33.1%	100%
		% of Total	12.9%	11.8%	12.2%	36.9%
	Neutral/Unclear	Count	47	52	52	151
		% within Position	31.1%	34.4%	34.4%	100%
		% of Total	10.4%	11.6%	11.6%	33.6%
Total		Count	160	148	142	450
		% within Position	35.6%	32.9%	31.6%	100%
		% of Total	35.6%	32.9%	31.6%	100%

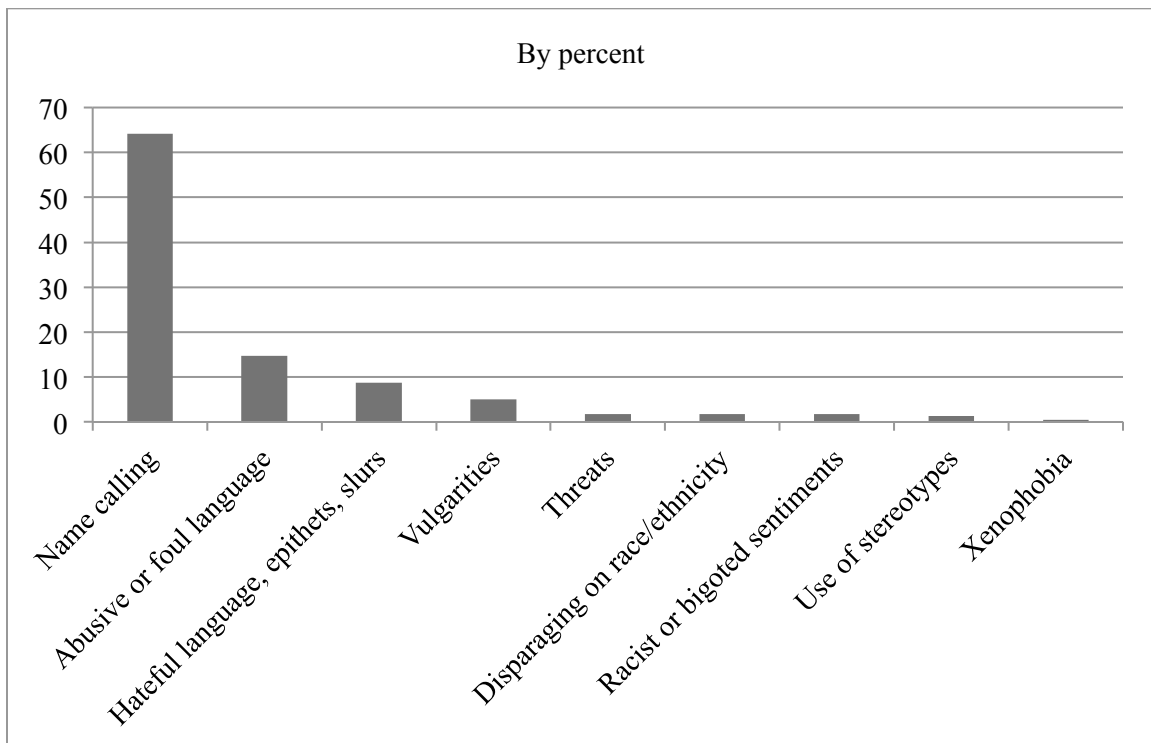
RQ2 asked about the extent to which anonymous comments were civil following news stories, blogs and columns about the Tea Party movement. In comments following such items, just over a third (35.6%) were uncivil. Fewer (32.9%) were unclear or neither especially uncivil nor especially civil, and 31.6% were civil (see Table 8).

RQ3 asked if there was a difference in civility among anonymous commenters who held the majority or minority position. Commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were in favor of the Tea Party movement were significantly more likely to express themselves with uncivil comments ($\chi^2(4) = 3.96, p < .001$). Of the 133 comments that favored the movement, 41.4% were uncivil, 32.3% were either unclear or neither especially uncivil nor civil, and 26.3% were civil. Those commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were against the movement were more evenly split. Of the 166 comments that opposed the movement, 34.9% were uncivil, 31.9% were either unclear or neither especially uncivil nor civil, and 33.1% were civil (see Table 8).

The most common vehicles for the expression of incivility in this area were comments that invoked name-calling (64.2%) and abusive and foul language (14.7%) (see Table 9).

TABLE 9
Anonymous Tea Party Incivility By Type

Category	Frequency	Percent
Name calling	140	64.2
Abusive or foul language	32	14.7
Hateful language, epithets, slurs	19	8.7
Vulgarity	11	5
Threats	4	1.8
Disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity	4	1.8
Racist or bigoted sentiments	4	1.8
Use of stereotypes	3	1.4
Xenophobia	1	.5
Total	218	100



RQ4 asked if there is a difference between the type of argument used in the anonymous comments and the majority or minority position. First, the vast majority of commenters (74.9%) made emotional appeals in their comments. Few (8.7%) incorporated the use of facts and figures, and a small number (3.6%) used both (see Table 10).

TABLE 10

Comment Position and Argument Type Crosstabulation							
			Argument type				Total
			Informational	Emotional	Both	Unclear	
Position	Pro-Tea Party	Count	8	104	21	0	133
		% within Position	6%	78.2%	15.8%	.0%	100%
		% of Total	1.8%	23.1%	4.7%	.0%	29.6%
	Anti-Tea Party	Count	16	121	28	1	166
		% within Position	9.6%	72.9%	16.9%	.6%	100%
		% of Total	3.6%	26.9%	6.2%	.2%	36.9%
	Neutral/ Unclear	Count	15	112	9	15	151
		% within Position	9.9%	74.2%	6%	9.9%	100%
		% of Total	3.3%	24.9%	2%	3.3%	33.6%
Total		Count	39	337	58	16	450
		% within Position	8.7%	74.9%	12.9%	3.6%	100%
		% of Total	8.7%	74.9%	12.9%	3.6%	100%

The majority of those commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were in favor of the Tea Party movement were significantly more likely to express themselves with an emotional appeal ($\chi^2(6) = 36.4, p = < .001$). Even though the vast majority of comments used emotional appeals, there was a distinction between the commenters who were for or against the movement. Of the 133 comments that favored the legislation, 78.2% used an emotional appeal, while of the 166 commenters who opposed the bill, 72.9% used an emotional appeal (see Table 10).

RQ5 asked if there was a difference in the civility of the anonymous comments and the type of argument used. Commenters who expressed themselves with an emotional appeal usually did so with an uncivil sentiment ($\chi^2(6) = 72.1, p < .001$). Of the 337 comments that incorporated emotional appeals, 43% were uncivil, 32.6% were either unclear or neither especially civil nor especially uncivil and 24.3% were civil (see Table 11).

TABLE 11

Argument Type and Civility Crosstabulation						
			Civility			Total
			Uncivil	Neither/nor-Uncivil	Civil	
Argument type	Informational	Count	3	11	25	39
		% within Type	7.7%	28.2%	64.1%	100%
		% of Total	.7%	2.4%	5.6%	8.7%
	Emotional	Count	145	110	82	337
		% within Type	43%	32.6%	24.3%	100%
		% of Total	32.2%	24.4%	18.2%	74.9%
	Both	Count	12	13	33	58
		% within Type	20.7%	22.4%	56.9%	100%
		% of Total	2.7%	2.9%	7.3%	12.9%
	Unclear	Count	0	14	2	16
		% within Type	.0%	87.5%	12.5%	100%
		% of Total	.0%	3.1%	.4%	3.6%
Total		Count	160	148	142	450
		% within Type	35.6%	32.9%	31.6%	100%
		% of Total	35.6%	32.9%	31.6%	100%

Part III — Non-Anonymous Immigration

The second hypothesis predicted that online newspaper discussion boards that follow news about immigration and that disallow anonymity contain mostly comments by those who support tough immigration laws who express themselves with emotionally laden, but civil, comments directed at Latinos.

Among the sample of 450 comments, a majority of commenters (52.2%) supported tough immigration laws. Far fewer (13.6%) expressed sentiments that were

sympathetic toward or in favor of current immigration policy. The position of 34.2% of the commenters was unclear or neutral. In comments following such news items, 44% of the comments were civil, 28.7% were uncivil and nearly the same amount (27.3%) was either unclear or neither especially uncivil nor especially civil (see Table 12). Latinos as a group or a Latino/a as an individual were addressed or invoked in 63.3% of the comments, while 36.4% made no such mention.

TABLE 12

Comment Position and Civility Crosstabulation						
			Civility			Total
			Uncivil	Neither/nor- Unclear	Civil	
Position	Pro-immigration	Count	8	14	39	61
		% within Position	13.1%	23%	63.9%	100%
		% of Total	1.8%	3.1%	8.7%	13.6%
	Anti-immigration	Count	90	74	71	235
		% within Position	38.3%	31.5%	30.2%	100%
		% of Total	20%	16.4%	15.8%	52.2%
	Neutral/ Unclear	Count	31	35	88	154
		% within Position	20.1%	22.7%	57.1%	100%
		% of Total	6.9%	7.8%	19.6%	34.2%
Total		Count	129	123	198	450
		% within Position	28.7%	27.3%	44%	100%
		% of Total	28.7%	27.3%	44%	100%

Commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were in favor of immigration were significantly more likely to express themselves with civil comments ($\chi^2(4) = 41.4, p < .001$). Of the 61 comments that favored immigration, 13.1% were uncivil, 23% were either unclear or neither especially uncivil nor especially civil, and 63.9% were civil. Those commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were against immigration were slightly more likely to express themselves with uncivil as civil comments. Of the 235 comments that opposed immigration, 38.3% were uncivil, 31.5%

were either unclear or neither especially uncivil nor especially civil, and 30.2% were civil (see Table 12).

The most common vehicles for the expression of incivility in this category were comments that invoked name-calling (22.9%), abusive or foul language (14.1%), xenophobia (12.5%), racist or bigoted sentiments (11.2%) and disparaging sentiments on the basis of race/ethnicity (10.9%) (see Table 13).

Finally, a vast majority of commenters (67.6%) made emotional appeals in their comments. A moderate amount (17.8%) incorporated the use of facts and figures, and a small amount (14.7%) used both (see Table 14).

The majority of those commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were in favor of immigration were more likely to express themselves with an emotional appeal, though the results were not significant ($\chi^2(4) = 8.9, p = .062$). Even though a vast majority of comments used emotional appeals, there was a distinction between the commenters who were for or against the movement. Of the 61 commenters who favored immigration, 52.5% used an emotional appeal while of the 235 commenters who opposed immigration, 69.4% used an emotional appeal (see Table 14).

Commenters who expressed themselves with an emotional appeal were equally likely to do so with a civil or uncivil sentiment ($\chi^2(4) = 32.4, p < .001$). Of the 304 comments that used emotional appeals, 34.9% were uncivil, 29.9% were either unclear or neither especially civil nor especially uncivil and 35.2% were civil (see Table 15).

TABLE 13
Non-Anonymous Immigration Incivility By Type

Category	Frequency	Percent
Name calling	86	22.9
Abusive or foul language	53	14.1
Xenophobia	47	12.5
Racist or bigoted sentiments	42	11.2
Disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity	41	10.9
Hateful language, epithets, slurs	37	9.9
Use of stereotypes	29	7.7
Vulgarity	21	5.6
Threats	19	5.1
Total	375	100

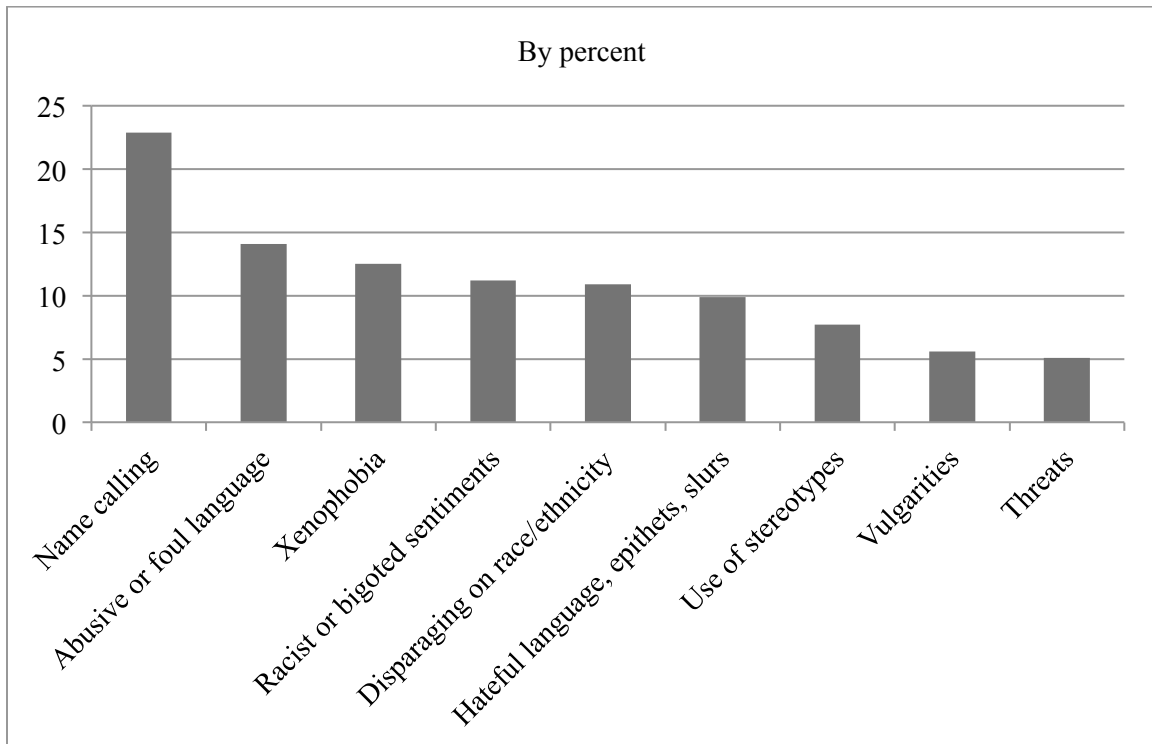


TABLE 14

Comment Position and Argument Type Crosstabulation						
			Type			Total
			Informational	Emotional	Both	
Position	Pro-immigration	Count	16	32	13	61
		% within Position	26.2%	52.5%	21.3%	100%
		% of Total	3.6%	7.1%	2.9%	13.6%
	Anti-immigration	Count	36	163	36	235
		% within Position	15.3%	69.4%	15.3%	100%
		% of Total	8%	36.2%	8%	52.2%
	Neutral/Unclear	Count	28	109	17	154
		% within Position	18.2%	70.8%	11%	100%
		% of Total	6.2%	24.2%	3.8%	34.2%
Total		Count	80	304	66	450
		% within Position	17.8%	67.6%	14.7%	100%
		% of Total	17.8%	67.6%	14.7%	100%

TABLE 15

Argument Type and Civility Crosstabulation						
			Civility			Total
			Uncivil	Neither/nor-Unclear	Civil	
Type	Informational	Count	11	16	53	80
		% within Type	13.8%	20%	66.3%	100%
		% of Total	2.4%	3.6%	11.8%	17.8%
	Emotional	Count	106	91	107	304
		% within Type	34.9%	29.9%	35.2%	100%
		% of Total	23.6%	20.2%	23.8%	67.6%
	Both	Count	12	16	38	66
		% within Type	18.2%	24.2%	57.6%	100%
		% of Total	2.7%	3.6%	8.4%	14.7%
Total		Count	129	123	198	450
		% within Type	28.7%	27.3%	44%	100%
		% of Total	28.7%	27.3%	44%	100%

Thus, three elements of H2 were supported.

Part IV — Comparisons

The third hypothesis predicted that anonymous comments following news about immigration would be more uncivil than comments following stories about the Tea Party movement.

Among the sample of 900 comments, immigration commenters were significantly more likely to write an uncivil comment than Tea Party commenters ($\chi^2(2) = 43, p < .001$) (see Table 16). Of the 400 uncivil comments between both topics, immigration commenters wrote 60% of the uncivil comments while Tea Party commenters did so in 40% of the comments. The Tea Party discussion forums also saw more civil comments compared to discussion forums following news items on immigration. Of the 209 civil comments between both news topics, immigration commenters weighed in with 32.1% of the civil comments while Tea Party comments did so with 67.9% of the comments.

TABLE 16

Anonymous and Non-Anonymous Position Crosstabulation						
			Civility			Total
			Uncivil	Neither/nor-Unclear	Civil	
Topic	Immigration	Count	240	143	67	450
		% within Topic	53.3%	31.8%	14.9%	100%
		% of Total	26.7%	15.9%	7.4%	50%
	Tea Party	Count	160	148	142	450
		% within Topic	35.6%	32.9%	31.6%	100%
		% of Total	17.8%	16.4%	15.8%	50%
Total		Count	400	291	209	900
		% within Topic	44.4%	32.3%	23.2%	100%
		% of Total	44.4%	32.3%	23.2%	100%

Thus, H3 was supported.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that non-anonymous comments would be more civil than anonymous comments in discussion forums following news about immigration.

Among the sample of 900 comments, anonymous commenters were significantly more likely to register their opinion with an uncivil comment than non-anonymous commenters ($\chi^2(2) = 99.6, p < .001$) (see Table 17). Of the 369 uncivil comments between both groups on the topic of immigration, anonymous commenters wrote 65% of the uncivil comments while non-anonymous commenters did so in 35% of the comments.

Non-anonymous commenters were nearly three times as likely to remain civil in their comments as those who were anonymous. Of the 265 civil comments between both groups, non-anonymous commenters weighed in with 25.3% of the civil comments while anonymous comments did so with 74.7% of the comments.

TABLE 17

Anonymous and Non-Anonymous Civility Crosstabulation						
			Civility			Total
			Uncivil	Neither/nor-Unclear	Civil	
Anonymity	Anonymous	Count	240	143	67	450
		% within Anonymity	53.3%	31.8%	14.9%	100%
		% of Total	26.7%	15.9%	7.4%	50%
	Non-anonymous	Count	129	123	198	450
		% within Anonymity	28.7%	27.3%	44%	100%
		% of Total	14.3%	13.7%	22%	50%
Total		Count	369	266	265	900
		% within Anonymity	41%	29.6%	29.4%	100%
		% of Total	41%	29.6%	29.4%	100%

Thus, H4 was supported.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In the past few years, the topic of immigration has been an inescapable area of news coverage. With the Supreme Court set to decide whether Arizona is entitled to impose tough anti-immigration measures outlined in SB 1070 over the Obama administration's objections, the topic of immigration remains a top issue, especially as the run-up to another presidential election begins. Newspapers, faced with shrinking newsroom staff, have nevertheless risen to the task of covering the important issues of the day, including issues of undocumented immigrants and the Tea Party. Faced with the reality that more people are reading the news online than in print, newspapers have adapted by trying to build a loyal, online audience by making the news-consumption experience more engaging by allowing readers to weigh in with a comment.

Just as the topic of immigration has garnered robust coverage, online commenting forums have generated robust discussion. Designed to provide a new virtual public space for people to exchange ideas and opinions, the commenting forums have nevertheless engendered harmful consequences that newspapers are finding increasingly difficult to ignore. Incivility quickly became apparent soon after many newspapers launched their commenting forums several years ago, and many newspapers are still struggling with how to raise the level of online discourse; some have addressed the problem by either disallowing comments on certain topics, disallowing anonymity or abandoning the forums altogether. Those newspapers, however, remain in the distinct minority as most large and mid-size newspapers continue to allow anonymous comments in their discussion boards. This has spelled an unsettling trend in the way some minority groups,

including Latinos, are represented in this new open space. The opinions in the boards, this research has shown, often invoke bigoted language, stereotypes, epithets or ethnic slurs and xenophobic or other hateful expressions. These kinds of comments represent the latest assault on immigrants, specifically undocumented Mexican immigrants, who are historically the victims of scapegoating during times of economic crisis.¹⁵⁶ Alarming is the finding that more than half of the comments in the anonymous forums following news on immigration were uncivil, meaning they contained some sentiment of hate, xenophobia or bigotry, thus representing a flagrant violation of the guidelines for user participation that online newspapers set for themselves.

Unlike previous research, which has shown that xenophobic language can often be found in the subtext of news stories and headlines through the use of metaphors,¹⁵⁷ these findings demonstrate that xenophobia toward Latinos can be found explicitly in the user-generated content that newspapers now provide. In this way, in their new role in creating a new public square of open discussion, newspapers are sometimes creating forums, perhaps inadvertently, for hate speech. The anonymous uncivil comments range from bigoted to outright hostile (see Appendix G). One commenter on an *Arizona Republic* board suggested that if the SB 1070 bill does not pass, “it will be up to us to grab the broom and start getting rid of the roaches.”¹⁵⁸ After a story about a pro-immigrant rally in Los Angeles, a commenter on a *Los Angeles Times* board wrote: “Had I been there I would have run them over.”¹⁵⁹ Several commenters suggest genocide as a possible solution. “If I had me way...take 5000 hum vees with 50 calibers put them on the border...shoot anything that moves...then use bunker busters on the tunnels...then invade Mexico and kill ‘em all,” a *Times* commenter wrote.¹⁶⁰ “If I were elected

President, I would have a shoot to kill law enacted on all illegals coming into the U.S. It wouldn't take to long before our friends to the south got the message...then we would see how many come across the border,” wrote another in a *Houston Chronicle* forum.¹⁶¹ Indeed, following many news stories on immigration, Latinos and Latino immigrants were regularly portrayed as subhuman and insidious by commenters who felt threatened by what they generally perceived, as expressed in their comments, to be a loss of their cultural hegemony. In this way, many remarks in online newspaper comment forums collectively reinforce the “otherness” of an already marginalized group.

This research also examined another controversial but non-racialized topic in order to gauge differences in comment tone. The Tea Party movement has received considerable news coverage since it emerged in 2009 in protest of President Obama’s bank bailout and economic stimulus package, and scores of readers in online comment boards have weighed in with an opinion. As with immigration, commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were in favor of the Tea Party movement were more likely to express themselves with uncivil comments. The main purpose of measuring civility of the comments following stories on the Tea Party was to compare it to the civility of comments following news stories on immigration. Overall, a much higher percentage of anonymous comments following news about immigration were uncivil than anonymous comments following stories about the Tea Party.

Critical race theory, which explores the relationship between racism and oppression,¹⁶² may help explain the difference. Even though both issues are controversial, a racialized topic may be more apt to draw incendiary responses than a new, non-racialized topic because, according to critical race theory, racism is more deeply

entrenched in U.S. society and comes with the belief that certain groups of people — rather than just ideologies or political positions — are superior to other groups. The proclivity of people to be more uncivil in their opinions when the topic revolves around race may also hinge on the idea that people sometimes use hate speech as a device of intentional persuasion. Whillock argues that in a “hate stratagem” model, hate speech is used consciously to inflame the emotions of followers, denigrate the out-class, inflict harm on the opposing group and, ultimately, to conquer.¹⁶³

Critical race theory also explores the unconscious, automatic or subtle — and more pervasive — forms of racism in society. On one hand, these relatively new comment boards, adopted by newspapers in their effort at creating an open space for a free exchange of ideas, have also opened the door to fulfilling a key aspect of critical race theory: the normalizing of racism. On the other hand, the subtle racism outlined in critical race theory, sometimes referred to as “racial microaggressions,”¹⁶⁴ may appear to be in conflict with the public sphere and the blatant racism expressed in online newspaper comment forums. Indeed, in many of the comments, any hint at subtle racism is missing, replaced instead with the unabashed racism of a pre-Civil Rights era, where bigoted sentiments were common, acceptable and ordinary. In their current form, many of these comment boards are platforms where people can be vicious, racist and even sadistic — and get away with it. They have contributed to turning back the dial of racial equality, a reawakening of a form of bigotry on a public scale not seen in decades.

Other tensions arise in the juxtaposition of the concept of the public sphere and critical race theory. The public sphere is essentially a conceptual idea in which an assemblage of private people gathers to discuss matters of public concern or common

interest and to reach a consensus about the common good. Because a public sphere comes into existence in the absence of any state or political control, it is designed as a mechanism for contesting political and state domination by rendering the state accountable to the citizenry.¹⁶⁵ In this way, the public sphere is an essential component of a democratic society. As Fraser points out, “the public sphere connoted an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters. This discussion was to be open and accessible to all; merely private interests were to be inadmissible; inequalities of status were to be bracketed; and discussants were to deliberate as peers.”¹⁶⁶ Therein, however, lies a discord with critical race theory.

The public sphere envisions a space where everyone is treated equally and all opinions are welcome — indeed, even necessary. Critical race theory, however, posits that great divides of social equality still exist in modern U.S. society. The public sphere calls for an even playing field for all participants, while critical race theory suggests that, in modern society, no such even playing field exists. The tension between the public sphere and critical race theory begins with the outlook of each; Habermas’ theory looks at the way things should be — an inclusive, utopian space in an idealized, rational society; critical race theory looks at things the way they are — a society still polarized by class struggle and fraught with racial inequities. When modern society is apt to act in subtle ways to subordinate and marginalize racial and ethnic minorities, and when that idea becomes clearly evident in the expression of opinions from online commenters, there no longer exists a space where notions of social class standing are suspended — a necessary element of the public sphere.

From a historical perspective, Fraser points out that the concept of the public sphere was originally dominated by bourgeois men and that a public sphere that stresses its openness and accessibility was never realized in that women and ethnic minorities were excluded from participation precisely on the basis of their race and gender. Fraser also points out, however, that if the public sphere is accepted as an idealistic space, then the ideal itself remains unaffected by issues of social inequality since it is possible that a future society might overcome the racial exclusions that undermine it.¹⁶⁷ Thus a true public sphere can exist when women and ethnic groups are no longer excluded from full societal membership, when, for example, Latinos are no longer constructed as “foreigners,” and thus not perceived to be a “foreigner” in the eyes of the public. Indeed, missing from most discussions about the effectiveness of the public sphere is — instead of who is participating in the discussion — how those participating in the discussion feel about those traditionally marginalized members of society. Habermas’ requirement for rational discourse in a public sphere can exist not just with the inclusion of all voices but with the perception among those involved in the discussion that all members of society are equal. This idea, of course, raises even more questions about the conflict between critical race theory and the public sphere. For example, given the institutional racism in society, how could an idealized society develop without first having forthright and candid discussions, as in the online forums, about race and racial inequality? Perhaps it is possible with civil discourse.

Finally, another conflict may exist in online reader comment boards that potentially undermines the effectiveness of the public sphere. Researchers have proposed that online participation has been monetized at a fundamental level and, as such, brings

into question the viability of the public sphere paradigm.¹⁶⁸ Goldberg argues that in order for a true public sphere to exist, its formation must be protected from economic interests because its value lies in its independence. “For Habermas, the dominant and powerful interests of the mass media must be excluded from the public sphere,” Goldberg writes.¹⁶⁹ At the same time, “the subordinated and oppressed interests of under-represented groups must be included,” Goldberg argues,¹⁷⁰ citing Fraser.¹⁷¹ “On the Internet, there is no ‘debating and deliberating’ that is not also ‘buying and selling (to use Fraser’s term); participation is a commercial act,” Goldberg writes. “Every instance of participation involves a transfer of data which has been economized, driving the profitability and viability of the networking industry and of internet-based companies....”¹⁷² Jönsson and Örnebring make a similar claim, concluding that there is a clear political economy of user-generated content: a provision of UGC in media, to a great extent, treats users as consumers and is part of a context of consumption.¹⁷³

It may be that a future researcher will look back on this time in the history of newspapers and see it as a turbulent era of transition — one in which the storied institution of the print newspaper was in the throes of reinventing itself in its slow migration to the Web. It may be curious to look back and see that this era was one in which online news offered by online newspapers was mostly free and in which newspapers allowed anonymous comments to be published directly beneath the news story — a clear and heavily promoted extension of the news story itself.

The objective behind removing anonymity in the comment boards, some newspapers claim, is that it will raise the level of the dialogue. Jimmy Orr, online managing editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, said that when the newspaper turned to

Facebook to eliminate the anonymity in reader comments, the quality of the discussion increased. By allowing anonymity on some regular news articles taken from the print edition and removing it on some blogs, the *Times* was able to compare the civility of the dialogue. “The level of discourse — the difference — was pretty stunning,” Orr said. “On the articles, it immediately plunged into the lowest common denominator — racism, threats, vulgarity. It was night-and-day.”¹⁷⁴ This study helps confirm the expectations of newspapers that have eliminated anonymity: There is indeed a dramatic improvement in the level of civility in online conversations when anonymity is removed.

While most of the comments in these non-anonymous forums were civil, meaning that removing anonymity — via such technology as the Facebook Comments Box social plugin — was a successful strategy for cutting down on the level of uncivil comment, it by no means eliminated incivility altogether. Indeed, nearly 30% of non-anonymous comments following news stories on immigration were found to be uncivil. In many ways, non-anonymous comments were just as vitriolic as the anonymous comments (see Appendix H). For example, a non-anonymous commenter in a *USA Today* forum concluded: “We don't need no stinking wet-backs,” using a derogatory term to describe a Mexican living in the U.S. Still, non-anonymous comments were more civil — in fact, nearly three times as likely to remain civil — than anonymous comments in discussion forums following news about immigration. In short, when anonymity was removed, civility prevailed. Considering the requirement for rational discourse in a public sphere, and considering that this research shows that anonymity is strongly related to discursive incivility, it is likely that anonymity cannot exist in a public sphere.

Still, it is important to point out that researchers have found benefits to anonymity. Singer, for example, concluded that anonymous forums served a useful purpose for people who were wary of the messages from politicians and the media. “In a sense, participation in an online discussion allows voters to reclaim a more fulfilling role in their democracy.”¹⁷⁵ And anonymity was key to that function: “While people can and do establish clear identities online, they also leave themselves an escape hatch,” Singer wrote. “They are known...but not really. They are accountable for what they say...but only so long as they choose to remain ‘visible’ to the online community.”¹⁷⁶

Overall, the last two hypotheses of this research can be summarized in this way: In measuring civility in online newspaper commenting forums, anonymity matters and topic matters. The ways people express themselves online appear to relate to both of these things. These findings should be of interest to those newspapers that allow anonymity and that have expressed frustration with rampant incivility and ad hominem attacks in their commenting forums, particularly those that follow sensitive topics, such as those dealing with race. Considering the potential for advancing constructive discussion in a new public sphere they have created, online newspapers should re-examine their role in facilitating community dialogue as they place themselves at the center of divisive debate linked to issues of race. Newspapers should also examine the extent to which their reputations are being tarnished as institutions of public trust as they break from their print policy of not publishing anonymous opinions and the effect it is having on the value of the new public sphere they have created. Finally, newspapers should examine the effect such comments are having for the reading loyalties of Latinos, the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority in the U.S., who are increasingly

navigating away from mainstream publications for a variety of reasons, including a feeling that the mainstream media contribute to a negative image of Latinos.¹⁷⁷

Implications and Future Research

Because this study only examined two topics of news coverage, immigration and the Tea Party, it would be valuable in future research to examine other topics as well, including non-controversial topics, in order to offer a better overall appraisal of which types of news topics generate more uncivil comments in both anonymous and non-anonymous forums. Sports stories, for example, appear to engender quite a few vitriolic sentiments, as do comments following news stories about crime or religion. Assessing the civility of comments following non-political and non-racialized stories would give a more broad and accurate picture of the overall civility of comments, perhaps offering some validation to those newspapers that disallow comments following certain topics.

Using the framework of critical race theory, this paper has argued that the issue of immigration is implicitly tied to race and the marginalization of a racial minority. As Sandoval has pointed out, “If the 12 million undocumented people living in the United States were Canadians, would there be any public outcry? Would anyone grab a megaphone and blame them for the messes we create? Would anyone be calling for a bullet to their heads?”¹⁷⁸ Examining comments following non-immigration stories about race, however, would also provide a sense of whether the issue of immigration itself stands alone as an especially incendiary topic of debate not necessarily and directly tied to issues of race. Observing the tone of non-anonymous comments following stories on the Tea Party movement and comparing it with the non-anonymous comments following stories on immigration — something not done in this study — would also allow for a

better understanding of how disallowing anonymity affects the tone of the comment across story topics.

In making the argument that the mass media serve an agenda-setting role, McCombs and Shaw originally posited that while they may have little influence on the direction and intensity of attitudes, the mass media set the agenda, influencing the salience of attitudes toward a particular topic.¹⁷⁹ In their research, they concluded that the world is reproduced, albeit imperfectly, by individual news media, and news consumers tend to share the media's composite definition of what is important. Priming is commonly referred to as the process in which audience members rely on those issues as a basis for evaluation, which are most salient to them when they must make a decision about a public figure.¹⁸⁰ Another type of cognitive effect is framing, whereby the media seek to reduce the complexity of issues for their audience by presenting the news in easy-to-understand packages or frames.¹⁸¹

As Branton and Dunaway point out, these theories may offer some explanation as to why people hold particular opinions such as, in the case of their research, Latino immigration. They describe attribute or second-level agenda setting as the salience-transfer that takes place when news organizations choose to emphasize certain characteristics or attributes of an issue, such as a disparaging frame of immigrants.¹⁸² When news organizations frame Latino immigration in a negative light, those aspects of the issue will become more salient in the public mind.¹⁸³ Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan have described attribute agenda-setting as an extension of agenda setting: "Whereas agenda setting deals with the salience of issues, attribute agenda setting, an extended version of agenda setting, is concerned with the salience of issue attributes."¹⁸⁴ For

example, researchers found that by covering certain issue aspects more prominently, the media increase the salience of those aspects among audience members. “The media, by emphasizing certain attributes of an issue, tell us ‘how to think about’ this issue as well as ‘what to think about,’ ” the authors wrote.¹⁸⁵ Finding strong support for the theory of attribute agenda-setting and the extent to which media coverage and public opinion were strongly correlated, Besova and Cooley further found that negative coverage tended to have more agenda-setting effects than neutral and positive coverage.¹⁸⁶ They found that by limiting the coverage around a few stories centered on a few issues, U.S. media tended to portray foreign countries stereotypically. Indeed, recent research found that an important outcome of attribute agenda setting was its priming effect.¹⁸⁷

In essence, attribute agenda setting speaks to how people’s beliefs about Latinos and immigration are derivative of the way the topics are portrayed in the media. The negative stereotypes and coded language seen in news coverage that dehumanize and stereotype Latino immigrants highlights the power of the news media in their ability to discursively construct groups of people. According to the theory of attribute agenda setting, by consistently and repeatedly framing issues of Latino immigration in a negative frame, news organizations influence how the public thinks about immigration; people begin to internalize the frame as true and valid, and therein stereotypes are reinforced. Indeed, the way racial minorities are framed usually influences the way audience members evaluate and consider issues surrounding minorities. It also works to influence public opinion by activating certain stereotypes already in the audience’s minds, including issues of welfare, crime and immigration.¹⁸⁸

Considering these ideas, one avenue for future research would be to examine the attributes of each news story — including those ascribed to immigrants — prior to coding the comments that follow in order to establish a direct connection to the applicability of the theory of attribute agenda setting. McCombs writes that “attribute agenda-setting focuses on the ability of the media to influence how we picture objects.”¹⁸⁹ As already argued, many comments in these forums represent one of the newest ways that derogatory characterizations of Latinos and Latino immigrants are being perpetuated. If agenda setting emphasizes the dynamics between communicators and their audiences,¹⁹⁰ is it fitting to position online reader comments within the context of agenda setting inasmuch as readers are, in bypassing the traditional gatekeeper, expressing and promoting their own agendas? As online reader comments become a common and featured component of news stories, what effect will they have on public opinion? What will be the ramifications, both in immigration public policy and in individual treatment of immigrants, if the public begins to trust what Lippmann called the “picture in our heads”¹⁹¹ of Latinos and Latino immigrants — pictures constructed not by the traditional gatekeeper but by members of the public themselves? In short, can attribute agenda setting be applied to online reader comments? And if so, can we begin to understand commenters as a new kind of agenda setter and moderators as a new kind of gatekeeper? Research into the impact of the reader comments and the extent to which the general public reads and values the comments could answer this question. Indeed, missing from the literature is any in-depth examination of the effects that reader comments are having on the general public. As Rafaeli pointed out in his discussion of theoretical models for

electronic bulletin boards, “Studying effects seems to be a reflexive reaction by all social scientists confronted with new phenomena.”¹⁹² Reader comments should be no exception.

Addressing the news production process, the theory of agenda building posits that members of the public can — in cases where they are persistent and considered legitimate by the traditional news gatekeepers — have an effect on the decisions of newsroom reporters and editors in helping decide what is news.¹⁹³ Altering the conventional agenda setting theory is what Nip calls the second phase of public journalism.¹⁹⁴ One of its components is interactive journalism, where readers are more engaged with reporters in the news-making process, either by content interactivity or interpersonal interactivity. This raises the question: Can agenda building be applied to reader comments? How often are reporters getting their cues on what is newsworthy based on reader comments? Research in this area has shown that reporters not only pay attention to the comments but also alter their view of what is newsworthy based on the opinions of readers in the comment boards.¹⁹⁵ In this way, is it possible that journalists who see messages repeated in the comment boards understand the sentiment to be the collective will and opinion of their reading public and subsequently act, or not act, on that information in their creation of the news? To test this possibility, more research into the effects of reader comments on reporters is needed.

As already mentioned, anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of comments in discussion forums dramatically drops off in online newspaper comment boards that require identification. Proponents of keeping anonymity in the comment boards have argued that requiring a real-name login decreases the quantity of the comments. Opinions and engagement on topics are also presumed to be watered down or less substantive when

a person's identity is intact. This area should be explored further in order to gauge the effectiveness of promoting constructive dialogue.

Finally, this research found that the civility of an anonymous comment was not necessarily tied to the position the commenter took on a topic, though the civility of the comment may be tied to the commenter's political affiliation. For example, those commenters who favored Arizona's immigration law — the majority of commenters — were more likely to express themselves with an uncivil sentiment. At the same time, those commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were against the Tea Party movement — the majority of commenters — were evenly split in their expression of civility. Another way of looking at it would be that commenters who expressed sentiments that showed they were in favor of Arizona's immigration law and the Tea Party were significantly more likely to express themselves with an uncivil sentiments. One way to interpret this would be that those who hold politically conservative views — at least on the two topics studied — are more apt to express themselves with uncivil comments. However, since the political affiliation of the commenter was not studied in this research, such a conclusion would be supposition. Future research asking commenters about their political association would be necessary in order to more conclusively make such an assertion.

Limitations

This study was limited in its measurement of civility. A three-point civility scale was set up using guidelines from previous research as well as the language in the forum rules used by the newspapers themselves. There might be more effective ways to measure the intensity of an uncivil comment by, for example, using a more-nuanced Likert-like

scale, though category definitions would need to be very clear to ensure reliability. Rather than just deciphering why a comment was considered uncivil, a comment could be coded for its level of incivility. Recognizing that not all uncivil comments are the same under the general definition of “uncivil,” parsing out which comments were slightly uncivil, moderately uncivil and extremely uncivil — via a more nuanced definition of what constitutes an “uncivil” comment — could be illuminating.

In the same way, the findings that most people use an “emotional” approach in making an argument was considerably lopsided. Since it is clear that a majority of people incorporate the use of emotional appeals in their comments, a more-nuanced definition of what constitutes “emotional” could have better illuminated strategies people use for making an argument. For example, arguments using analogies, personal experiences, sentimentality, imaginary or irrational situations or that incorporate the use of the first person might help elucidate the persuasiveness of the argument.

Coders were not asked to decipher whether a comment was a response to another comment or an initial comment. Deducing the difference might help in understanding the tone and tenor of those who were starting a conversation, those who were continuing it or those who were reacting to a comment made by someone else. Coders also were not asked to measure the effectiveness or quality of the comment. The claim has been made that removing anonymity in the comment forums might tend to alter the quality and constructiveness of the comments, thus undermining their purpose. The same way measuring a comment for its level of civility has been useful, measuring its level of quality would also have been beneficial if a reliable approach to measuring the quality of a comment could be achieved.

Notes

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¹⁵⁷ Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse*.

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¹⁵⁹ Post by "Bee" on July 29, 2010 on *LATimes.com*.

¹⁶⁰ Post by "a naturalized american citizen" on May 29, 2010 on *LATimes.com*.

¹⁶¹ Post by "CommunityLeader" on July 28, 2010 on *Chron.com*.

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¹⁶³ Rita K. Whillock, "The Use of Hate as a Stratagem for Achieving Political and Social Goals," in *Hate Speech*, ed. Rita K. Whillock and David Slayden (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995).

¹⁶⁴ Daniel G. Solórzano, "Critical Race Theory, Race and Gender Microaggressions, and the Experience of Chicana and Chicano Scholars," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 11, no. 1 (1998).

¹⁶⁵ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26, (1990).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶⁸ Greg Goldberg, "Rethinking the Public/Virtual Sphere: The Problem with Participation," *New Media & Society* 13, no. 5 (2011).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 744.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy."

¹⁷² Goldberg, "Rethinking the Public/Virtual Sphere: The Problem with Participation," 747.

¹⁷³ Anna Maria Jönsson and Henrik Örnebring, "User-Generated Content and the News," *Journalism Practice* 5, no. 2 (2011).

¹⁷⁴ Jeff Sonderman, "News sites using Facebook Comments see higher quality discussion, more referrals," *Poynter.org* (blog), Aug. 19, 2011, <<http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/media-lab/social-media/143192/news-sites-using-facebook-comments-see-higher-quality-discussion-more-referrals/>>.

¹⁷⁵ Singer, "Virtual Anonymity: Online Accountability and the Virtuous Virtual Journalist," 98.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁷⁷ Roberto Suro, "Changing Channels and Crisscrossing Cultures," *Pew Hispanic Center*, April 19, 2004, <<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2004/04/19/changing-channels-and-crisscrossing-cultures/>>.

¹⁷⁸ Sandoval, "Immigrants Once Again Become Convenient Scapegoat."

¹⁷⁹ McCombs and Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media."

¹⁸⁰ Sei-Hill Kim et al., "Attribute Agenda Setting, Priming and the Media's Influence on How to Think About a Controversial Issue," *International Communication Gazette* 74, no. 1 (2012).

¹⁸¹ Karen S. Johnson-Cartee, *News Narratives and News Framing: Constructing Political Reality* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

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¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Cockroaches, locusts, scumbags, rats, bums, buzzards, blood sucking leeches, vermin, slime, dogs, brown invaders, wetbacks. Drawn from online comment boards, these are among the terms used today to describe Latin American immigrants. These Latinos, according to some of the more vicious commenters, should be hunted down like deer and shot on sight; left to die from choking on beans; eviscerated by piranhas; run over in the street like dogs; and rounded up in cattle cars and roasted in oven chambers.

What is as alarming as the hate speech that often fills many of these comment boards and the way that Latino immigrants are cast as subhuman is that the online forums are not hosted by partisan ideologues or positioned in the most polarized outposts of the media world. The boards are, instead, created, endorsed and promoted by conventional U.S. newspapers, the same newspapers, that, not long ago, offered their readers only a couple of ways to express their opinion in public: with a letter to the editor or a phone-in line, both of which have long been scrutinized by editors for their content.

The arrival of a new era of participatory journalism, however, has spelled a profound transformation in the way members of the public express themselves. No longer relegated to the pages of the letters to the editor, members of the public can offer their opinion immediately and directly on any given issue in the comment boards that newspapers provide. The deliberation is centralized and contained in one place, a space where people with differing backgrounds and priorities can communicate on roughly equal terms with one another. In this way, online reader comment boards represent a new public sphere where people from all walks of life can gather and freely express

themselves about important issues. In the Age of the Internet, newspapers are no longer merely purveyors of news and information that set the public agenda; they now provide a forum for discussing the agenda, creating a virtual space where people, regardless of geographic location, can weigh in with an opinion. As this research has demonstrated, however, when there are few restrictions on who can join the conversation or the things that can be written and shared, the very idea that newspapers argue they are advancing in their defense of the online forums — social equality through democracy — is often the very thing that, for some ethnic minorities, is the first casualty.

It should not be surprising that the public dialogue in general — not just that found in commenting boards — has reached such a low point in U.S. politics. It would be difficult to argue that the political rancor and incivility that has been raging in the past few years has subsided. Early in 2012, a subway sign purchased by a private group in Washington, D.C., criticized President Obama's health care reform and ends with the words: "Go to hell Barack."¹⁹⁶ It is a testament to the reality of not just the arrival of another election year but also of a world where such blunt uncivil sentiments have become commonplace. From the subway sign to Rep. Joe Wilson's "You lie!" angry outburst in the middle of a presidential speech about how Democratic health proposals would not cover undocumented immigrants to Rush Limbaugh's on-air characterization of a Georgetown University Law School student as a "slut," the willingness and desire of people to express angry sentiments in public spaces has, in some ways, made the discussion forums offered by online newspapers inviting. Some believe such comments indicate that racism in the U.S. has not declined as much as people may think. Joe Feagin, a sociologist at Texas A&M University, said a study of 626 white college students at 28

institutions revealed thousands of examples of racism in “backstage,” all-white settings. “Are these comments cause for alarm?” Washington asks. “ ‘Like the loudest ambulance siren you’ve ever heard,’ Feagin replied. ‘All this stuff was already there. It’s just the Internet has opened a window into it that we normally would not have had.’ ”¹⁹⁷

Newspapers, in a new era of convergence, are adapting to the demands of a new Internet audience that seeks engagement and immediacy. As newspapers are learning, however, there are repercussions in rushing headlong into embracing a new technology that provides both of those things. As Levmore and Nussbaum point out, “It is cheap to slur someone on the Internet, for it can be done with a few keystrokes, with complete anonymity, and...with no fear that the Internet forum provider on whose website the slur is found will somehow be held responsible for incorrect, mean-spirited, or defamatory statements.”¹⁹⁸

The real danger of the uncivil and, in many cases, racist sentiments expressed toward Latinos in these relatively new forums may be that the attitudes expressed therein begin to seep into the public’s subconscious as normal, commonplace and acceptable. As Chavez points out in his examination of derogatory imagery of Mexican immigrants in popular magazine covers: “It must be emphasized that the visual metaphors and images used to characterize Mexican immigrants and Mexican immigration are not natural. They are used because they resonate with taken-for-granted assumptions and narratives about Mexicans and Mexico prevalent in American society.”¹⁹⁹ Santa Ana describes this kind of disparaging portrayal of Latinos in the media as reinforcing a negative view of immigrants and the erasure of their individuality and humanity.²⁰⁰

Many online commenters might get their cues from the remarks of some legislators and pundits who openly regard Latino immigrants as dangerous, animalistic and disposable. In July 2006, Rep. Steve King of Iowa compared undocumented immigrants to livestock, suggesting an electrified fence as a way to deter them.²⁰¹ In March 2010, Samuel Joe Wurzelbacher, also known as Joe the Plumber, offered a solution for what he called lax enforcement of border security: “Put a fence in, start shooting.”²⁰² Later that year, State Rep. John Yates of Georgia compared undocumented immigrants to Hitler’s army and suggested dropping leaflets over Mexico “that says that we will shoot to kill if anybody crosses, and be serious about this.”²⁰³ In March 2011, Kansas Rep. Virgil Peck suggested shooting immigrants like feral hogs.²⁰⁴ Four months later, Rep. Mo Brooks of Alabama said he would do anything “short of shooting” immigrants in order to stop undocumented immigrants from entering the U.S.²⁰⁵ Three months after that, Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain said that part of his immigration policy would be to build an electrified fence on the country’s border with Mexico that could kill people trying to enter the country without proper documents. Cain added: “If we have to put troops with real guns and real bullets for part of it, we can do that too.”²⁰⁶ Subtler allusions, such as those via metaphor, abound. In February 2011, Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer described “an invasion” of immigrants and said at issue was the “safety and welfare” of the citizenry.²⁰⁷ Santa Ana explains that when political leaders begin to speak of groups of people in this way, the public sees it as acceptable to do the same. Referring to California Gov. Pete Wilson of the early 1990s and the blame he put on immigrants to win the favor of recession-weary voters, Santa Ana writes: “In California, the political bellwether of the country, Latinos took center stage — as targets

of public outrage. Once the governor expressed anti-Latino sentiments, xenophobia was no longer confined to private discussions. It became the stuff of public discourse.”²⁰⁸

What does it mean when elected officials and political hopefuls openly and unabashedly suggest genocide as a way of dealing with undocumented immigrants? The implications of such characterizations, seen in politicians’ comments in news stories and echoed in reader comment forums, are profound. “Once a group of people is defined as somehow not fully human, as animal-like, or as disease or national burden, then it is easier to treat such individuals like debased people or animals,” wrote Feagin.²⁰⁹ History has proven this to be correct. One nineteenth-century white settler in Oregon wrote: “It was customary to speak of the Indian man as a Buck; of the woman as a Squaw; until at length, in the general acceptance of these terms they ceased to recognize the rights of Humanity in those to whom they were so applied. By a very natural and easy transition, from being spoken of as brutes, they came to be thought of as game to be shot, or as vermin to be destroyed.”²¹⁰

User-generated commentary should, in its ideal form, serve as an entry point into the national discourse on immigration. Instead, it is a morass of incivility. One of the consequences of a participatory model of journalism is a contradiction whereby online newspapers regularly publish hate-filled language that would otherwise never appear in the printed version, raising questions about how to regard such dialogue in conversations about uninhibited debate and free speech. Some point out that such language has no place in constructive discourse. “Racial epithets...are devoid of any utility other than to do harm,” Carter points out. “We are well past the point in history where we believe that epithets contribute anything to democratic dialogue.”²¹¹

This research, which adds to the growing canon of communication literature that looks at the differences between print and online newspapers, has demonstrated that a new public sphere created by online newspapers, meant to promote democracy, may actually be having the opposite effect for some Latino groups in the way they are portrayed. When the majority of large and mid-size U.S. newspapers still allow anonymity in their comment forums, and when the majority of comments in those forums following a racialized topic invoke bigoted language, stereotypes, epithets, ethnic slurs and xenophobic or other hateful expressions, it is fitting to declare a breakdown of that new public sphere. Additionally, if the concept of a public sphere works best when diverse voices are heard and diverse opinions discussed, this breakdown creates a problem for Latinos and non-Latinos alike. If a group of marginalized people is regularly disparaged in online forums, discourse that is meant to inform, enlighten and stimulate is instead weakened for everybody, making it a less effective public sphere.

There may be ways, however, to restore it to a space of constructive debate and discussion as it was intended. One solution is to remove anonymity, which this content analysis indicates has the effect of elevating the level of dialogue. Facebook's social plugin application may not be the perfect solution, but it is one that a small but growing number of newspapers across the country are quietly are turning to, including New York's *Buffalo News* and Pennsylvania's *Reading Eagle*. Removing anonymity in the comment boards will have its critics beyond those invoking free speech claims. Research has shown that anonymity allows people to more freely express themselves.²¹² Reader has argued that anonymous opinions allow people to state their point of view, regardless of their social status.²¹³ His research found that among people who had never written

non-anonymous letters to the editor, more than a third of women and nearly half of non-whites said they would write letters if their names would not be published. That opinion was also expressed by large percentages of people with annual incomes below \$25,000, according to Reader.²¹⁴ “If journalists try to silence the ‘haters and hollers’ by banning anonymous comments online,” Reader writes, “they also will silence the poor, the vulnerable and the dispossessed.”²¹⁵ The paradox, of course, is that those who are most often maligned and cast as malevolent in the comment boards by anonymous commenters are also the poor, vulnerable and dispossessed. Boyd has also proffered this argument; “The people who most heavily rely on pseudonyms in online spaces are those who are most marginalized by systems of power,” she writes. “ ‘Real names’ policies aren’t empowering; they’re an authoritarian assertion of power over vulnerable people.”²¹⁶ While the ability to freely express oneself in a public discussion is often invoked in this context, what is often left out of such considerations is the portrayal of the very people around which the public discussion revolves. When someone spray paints swastikas and writes racial epithets on a public building, as was recently the case in Oregon,²¹⁷ it is investigated as a hate crime (the crime of intimidation in the form of hateful speech fits under the Oregon definition of hate crime), but when someone calls someone a “wetback” and threatens to kill them and their family in an online newspaper commenting forum, it is defended as free speech or a right of the disenfranchised to express themselves, and the newspaper is absolved of any responsibility.²¹⁸ Matsuda et al. address this issue: “What is ultimately at stake in this debate is our vision for this society. We are in this fight about the first amendment because it is more than a fight about how to balance one individual’s freedom of speech against another individual’s freedom from

injury. This is a fight about the substantive content that we will give to the ideas of freedom and equality — how we will construct ‘freedom,’ as a constitutional premise and a defining principle of democracy.”²¹⁹

Newspapers struggling with the dilemma of incivility in anonymous comment boards must weigh the benefits and the drawbacks of these two ideas: Allowing anonymity so that an out-group would be more apt to weigh in on the discussion or disallow anonymity so as to impede the perpetuation of the “otherness” of that very out-group. Newspapers must consider whether raising the level of discourse by removing anonymity is worth the possibility of decreased user participation. It is worth pointing out that, at the end of the day, many newspapers struggling today for financial sustainability are not in a position to make that distinction. The growth of reader comments and robust commenting is critical to newspapers’ financial survival in the inevitable shift from print to online, as *The Washington Post* has pointed out,²²⁰ and Web hits and brand loyalty are the new currency for online newspapers.

Still, other options exist. Another solution beyond requiring registration and a real name in order to comment is to find some middle ground. At the crux of any of the myriad ways for improving comment boards, including authenticating identities and installing a reputation and scoring system is, essentially, a better filtering system. As Shirky has pointed out, “There is no such thing as information overload, there’s only filter failure.”²²¹ Many newspapers, such as the *Plain Dealer* have embraced anonymity in their discussion forums and have on staff, as many newspapers do, a few moderators to remove offensive comments, often at the prompting of the reading public.²²² On stories that are especially sensitive, however, the commenting forums are disabled entirely.

Other newspapers have done the same, including identifying topics that are apt to generate the most hateful comments. The Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, for example, does not allow comments on stories involving crime, fatalities/suicides, gays, or those that are racially sensitive. “It continues to be virtually impossible to have a civil discourse” in those areas, said Terry Sauer, the *Star Tribune*’s assistant managing editor/digital.²²³

Other newspapers, such as the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, segregate comments on a separate website so as to disassociate the commentary from the integrity of the website where the news resides. Recognizing the scarcity of resources to have fulltime moderators screen every comment, some newspapers, such as the *Pioneer Press* and *The Oregonian*, press journalists into service as moderators. Still other newspapers are utilizing other third-party providers beyond Facebook, such as Topix, Disqus and Livefyre, to allow readers to comment on the news stories they produce.

The Huffington Post, which bills itself as “the Internet newspaper,” moderates its 175,000 comments a day with a team of 30 human moderators and automation tools, such as “HuffPost Badges” whereby users attain higher levels of credibility based on their activity on the site, including flagging inappropriate comments.²²⁴ That level of user engagement is testament to the *Post*’s embrace of a participatory model of online news. “People no longer want to passively sit back and be served up news, information and entertainment. They want to engage with a story, react to it, add to it and share it,” Huffington said.²²⁵ Slashdot.org similarly has a user-centered rating system that rewards favored comments with votes of approval while “trolls” and other troublemakers are voted down. Critics say such systems, however, are apt to translate into the silencing of

someone who holds a minority opinion. In development now by Google is a new article commenting system tied to its Google+ social network.²²⁶

In March 2011, NPR rolled out a unique new moderating system in which all new users were required to go through a probationary period in which a community manager reviewed all of their comments prior to appearing on the site.²²⁷ NPR said it expected the review to take fewer than 15 minutes for each comment, a move that eliminates the immediacy of a comment post but that, NPR hopes, will restore some civility.²²⁸ Once a user establishes a reputation for following the commenting guidelines, all of his or her comments will appear immediately after posting. “Managing an online community is more art than science,” NPR said, “and we want to balance our desire to have an open community with our goal of promoting a civil conversation.”²²⁹

Ultimately, user-generated feedback, especially criticism, is supposed to make things better — a better meal, a better movie, a better shopping experience, a better newspaper — because with their commentary or rating, members of the public are holding the people who make these things to a higher standard. The civility of the criticism and the credibility of the commenter, however, is key to making this idealized process work. It may be that in the early years of this new commenting/rating technology that allows public participation in ways never before seen, there are varying forms of effectiveness. One of its worst forms is demonstrated by uncivil comments by anonymous commenters directed at minority groups. This paper has argued that the perpetuation of such uncivil rhetoric, as seen in the comment board of online newspapers, may have devastating and lasting repercussions for all Latinos, across all ethnicities and generations. This research should ultimately serve as an invitation for newspapers to find

better ways of making a new communication tool in the maintenance of social equality better. The newspaper, as it continues to evolve, should see this as an opportunity to improve its online commenting boards as a way of establishing a new foothold as a central facilitator in the maintenance of democracy in a current and future world in which news, ideas and opinions are all traded online. This begins by assessing what parts of the new communication tool work and what do not; what makes the technology better, and what makes it worse. “The Internet, while it has made political communication messy and tremendously complex, enables a great advance in citizenship development and participation,” Herbst writes. “If we pursue more sophisticated, useful public dialogues and realize our agency to do so, the next chapter in American civility will be one that harnesses technology for democracy in the very best ways.”²³⁰ If comment boards of online newspapers were used the way they were intended, they could have, at their best, the potential to effect change — of giving a voice to the voiceless and equal treatment to the disenfranchised, of altering perceptions and modifying the dominant values of society, of changing minds and political policy, of inspiring new ideas and rousing new agendas, of contributing to the discursive narrative of the collective American experience. Newspapers should take this constitutive moment and, as they look ahead to reinventing themselves, remember their history and their fundamental role in a democratic society.

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APPENDIX A
CODING PROTOCOL

PART I

Background and Context

The law:

Arizona Senate Bill 1070, often referred to as SB 1070, is a legislative act in Arizona that is one of the broadest and strictest anti-illegal immigration measure in decades. U.S. federal law already requires certain immigrants to register with the U.S. government and to have registration documents in their possession at all times. The Act additionally makes it a state misdemeanor for an undocumented immigrant to be in Arizona without carrying the required documents. It also allows police broad power to stop and detain people on the suspicion of being in the country without documents. Critics say it encourages racial profiling and have called it an open invitation for harassment and discrimination against all Latinos. Supporters say the law prohibits the use of race as the sole basis for investigating immigration status and is necessary to curb the population of undocumented immigrants. Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer signed the bill into law in April 2010. The day before the law was to take effect in July, a federal judge issued an injunction that blocked the law's most controversial provisions.

The sample:

Online newspaper comments were collected from *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Arizona Republic* and *The Houston Chronicle*, the largest newspapers in three border states most affected by issues of immigration. Stories and columns that dealt with immigration and SB 1070 were chosen from each newspaper. About 2,500 comments were collected from each online newspaper. In all, 7,539 comments were collected from 35 news stories, columns and blogs. After numbering each sample sequentially from 1 to 7,539, a Web-based program randomly selected the numbers to 450 comments, which represents the sample to code.

The rules of online forums:

In explaining the rules governing their online comment boards, *The Los Angeles Times* reminds readers to "write in a common language that steers clear of personal attacks and/or vulgarities." It says that infractions include "abusive, off-topic or foul language; racist, sexist, homophobic or other offensive terminology." It also tells readers not to post a comment that "contains vulgar, profane, abusive, racist or hateful language or expressions, epithets or slurs, text, photographs or illustrations in poor taste, inflammatory attacks of a personal, racial or religious nature."

The Arizona Republic tells readers that "profanity or personal attacks or other inappropriate comments or material are not acceptable." The paper also notes that "comments that include ethnic slurs and/or epithets, sexist language or religious bigotry are not acceptable." Finally, "Comments should be civil and free of threats."

The Houston Chronicle tells readers that they should not post comments that “are fraudulent, unlawful, threatening, abusive, harassing, libelous, defamatory, obscene, vulgar, offensive, pornographic, profane, sexually explicit or indecent, or that threaten or invite violence, or that are derogatory of others on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual preference or disability.”

While each standard differs slightly from the other, all three newspapers essentially ask readers to remain civil in their remarks and refrain from ethnically and racially insensitive or hateful sentiments.

Coding Instructions:

In the sample, you will answer four questions for each comment. For each question, enter your answer (represented by a number) in the corresponding box in the coding sheet provided. Here are the questions:

1) What is the position of the commenter?

- (1) Pro-SB 1070 – favors the bill, its provisions and its implications.
- (2) Anti-SB 1070 – opposes the bill, its provisions and its implications.
- (3) Neutral – neither favors nor opposes the bill or does both.
- (4) Can’t be determined/unclear

Tip: Many commenters do not explicitly state that they are for or against the bill. Still, considering the whole comment, you should *interpret* as best you can what side the commenter is taking. (For example, this short comment — “Deport ‘em all!” — should be coded as a “1” since we can reasonably deduce that the commenter is in favor of the bill and its implications even though he or she doesn’t explicitly say so.)

2) Does the commenter address or mention Latinos or Latin Americans?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No

Latin Americans – are native residents of the parts of the American continent where Spanish or Portuguese is the main national language, including Mexico and, in effect, the whole of Central and South America, including many of the Caribbean islands.

Latinos – are Latin American inhabitants of the United States – either native born, foreign-born legal or undocumented immigrants.

Tip: The commenter does not have to use a specific term to describe Latinos or Latin Americans. For example, if the commenter uses the pronouns, “they” or “them,” and you understand it to be in the context of describing a Latino or Latin American, then the comment should be coded as “1.” (Considering that all of these comments follow news stories, blogs and columns about immigration and SB 1070, it’s reasonable to assume that many references to “they” or “them” are meant as references to Latinos).

For example, this comment — “If they can’t prove they’re here legally, they should be deported back to Mexico” — should be considered a case in which a Latino is addressed. This comment — “They should learn to speak English before coming here” — should also be coded as “1” since we can reasonably assume that the commenter is referring to a Latino.

3) How civil is the comment?

(1) **Uncivil:** the comment should have at least **one** of the following: personal or inflammatory attacks (known as “flaming”), name-calling, threats, vulgarities, abusive or foul language, xenophobic or other hateful language or expressions, epithets or ethnic slurs, sentiments that are racist or bigoted, disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity or that assign stereotypes.

(2) **Neither especially uncivil nor especially civil:** the comment should not have any of the “uncivil” characteristics. Still, the comment can be spirited. It may be impolite, contain scorn, ridicule or express derision or disapproval. The comment will fall in this category if it makes a coarse argument without resorting to hateful language. Poor manners does not necessarily equate to incivility. Calling people “illegals” or “aliens” should not be considered name-calling and would fall in this category.

(3) **Civil:** to be considered “civil,” the comment should not have any of the “uncivil” characteristics. The comment should be rational, well reasoned and free of any insults. The comment must be polite, respectful, courteous and considerate.

(4) **Can’t be determined:** the comment should fall into this category if, based on the whole comment, the tone of the comment is unclear.

Tips:

- Even if the commenter’s position can’t be determined, please code the civility of the comment, if possible. (For example, the comment — “You’re not very bright, are you?” — should be coded with a “4” in position and a “2” in civility.)
- One way to think of this is as a scale — “1” being the most **uncivil** and “3” being the most **civil**. Or as a movie rating — R, PG-13 and G.
- Be aware of your own biases when coding this category. Try to set aside any personal feelings you might have toward the topic.

3.2) If the comment is labeled “uncivil,” specify why.

Check all that apply with the corresponding number here:

- (1) Name calling
- (2) Threats
- (3) Vulgarities
- (4) Abusive or foul language
- (5) Xenophobia
- (6) Hateful language, epithets or slurs
- (7) Racist or bigoted sentiments
- (8) Disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity
- (9) Use of stereotypes

4) What is the type of argument?

(1) **Informational:** fact-based appeals that contextualize an issue by supplying factual information (or at least the perception of factual information) relating to the news story or topic at hand. To qualify as “informational,” the comment should be empirical — based on data or verifiable by observation or experience.

(2) Emotional: appeals to non-factual arguments and employs psychological tactics in attempting to generate an emotional response. Contains no empirical evidence to support the opinion.

(3) Both: contains both fact-based as well as emotional appeals.

Tip: Since there's no way to verify if any of the facts are true and valid, if you encounter a comment that uses empirical data that you know to be untrue or misleading, you should still code it as "informational."

Example #1:

America is a country of immigrants. Millions of immigrants populate all the USA and some reasonable and humane solution should be found by a nation that claims to be 'One Nation UNDER God". This law is a bad idea. The Texas-based Perryman Group calculated that if all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Arizona, the state would lose \$26.4 billion in economic activity, \$11.7 billion in gross state product, and approximately 140,324 jobs. God Bless the USA and ALL its decent people, no matter what color, race or country of origin. And PLEASE stand up for what is right.

This comment should be labeled:

Position: "2" (anti SB 1070)

Address Latino: "2" (no)

Civility: "3" (civil)

Argument type: "1" (informational)

Example #2

I applaud the Arizona governor and plan to order all my internet based purchases from Arizona based companies to show my support. The Attorney General should be removed from office. She should also expect the greatest amount of support from other true Americans who support her and the Arizona anti-illegal immigration bill. God bless her and those around her, especially those wearing the uniform of the United States military and all police organizations who put their lives on the line every day and night to keep us safe and free.

This comment should be labeled:

Position: "1" (pro SB 1070)

Address Latino: "2" (no)

Civility: "3" (civil)

Argument type: "2" (emotional)

Example #3

Gov. Jan Brewer is the best GOVERNOR in the United States! She is no dummy like the b**l-less Terminator we have in California. He can sit for hours on his butt because there is nothing there to stop him! You can't kick him in the b***s because he has none! Americans want SB 1070 to become law throughout the nation! Latinos in L.A. if you are illegal get out now before the police arrest you in the future, and stop harassing our American Athletic teams like the Lakers and the Dodgers like the jerks you are! We are tired of all of you Mexican jerks and you are making everyone hate you even more. Obama go with them!

This comment should be labeled:

Position: "1" (pro SB 1070)

Address Latino: "1" (yes)

Civility: "1" (uncivil)

Reason: (1) Name calling ("jerks")
(3) Vulgarities ("b**l-less," "b***s")
(5) Xenophobia
(7) Racist or bigoted sentiments
(8) Disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity

Argument type: "2" (emotional)

Example #4

I was pondering this whole debate thing on the new law from Arizona (SB 1070) since it's pre-signing to post-signing. I've read all the well thought out comments to the the most idiotic rhetorical rants here at L.A. Times, also. And it gave me a thought. It's not about race. It's not about Mexico. It's not about color. IT'S about POVERTY and EDUCATION. Class discrimination is what is happening right now. POOR people taking away jobs. POOR people taking over neighborhoods. POOR people taking advantage of benefits. POOR people overcrowding schools. POOR people being ignorant. See whats going on? If a rich Mexican was walking around, no one will take notice, would they? How about a well groomed, properly educated, upper-middle class Mexican, or Guatamalan, or Chinese, or whatever, would others take notice? Nah, not all all. So, what's the conclusion. There is none. Just that people do not like to be close to poor, uneducated folks. Look at Skid Row... anyone found a solution?

This comment should be labeled:

Position: "3" (neutral)

Address Latino: "1" (yes)

Civility: "3" (civil)

Argument type: "2" (emotional)

Example #5

You are all idiots!

This comment should be labeled:

Position: “4” (can’t be determined)

Address Latino: “2” (no)

Civility: “1” (uncivil)

Reason: **(1)** Name calling (“idiots”)

Argument type: “2” (emotional)

APPENDIX B

CODING PROTOCOL

PART II

Background and Context

The movement:

The Tea Party is an antigovernment, grass-roots political movement that began in 2009 and went on to become key to the Republicans' successful bid to take control of the House of Representatives in the 2010 midterm elections. Its supporters have vowed to purge the Republican Party of officials they consider not sufficiently conservative and block the Democratic agenda on the economy, the environment and health care. Tea Party supporters tend to unite around fiscal conservatism and a belief that the federal government has overstepped its constitutional powers. The 18 percent of Americans who identify themselves as Tea Party supporters tend to be Republican, white, male, married and older than 45. Tea Partiers hold more conservative views on a range of issues than Republicans generally. Tea Party supporters' fierce animosity toward Washington, and the president in particular, is rooted in deep pessimism about the direction of the country and the conviction that the policies of the Obama administration are disproportionately directed at helping the poor rather than the middle class or the rich.¹

The sample:

Online newspaper comments were collected from *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Arizona Republic* and *The Houston Chronicle*. Stories and columns that dealt with the Tea Party and Tea Party related-issues were chosen from each newspaper. About 2,500 comments were collected from each online newspaper. In all, 7,567 comments were collected from 23 news stories, columns and blogs. After numbering each sample sequentially from 1 to 7,567, a Web-based program randomly selected the numbers to 450 comments, which represents the sample to code.

The rules of online forums:

In explaining the rules governing their online comment boards, *The Los Angeles Times* reminds readers to “write in a common language that steers clear of personal attacks and/or vulgarities.” It says that infractions include “abusive, off-topic or foul language; racist, sexist, homophobic or other offensive terminology.” It also tells readers not to post a comment that “contains vulgar, profane, abusive, racist or hateful language or expressions, epithets or slurs, text, photographs or illustrations in poor taste, inflammatory attacks of a personal, racial or religious nature.”

The Arizona Republic tells readers that “profanity or personal attacks or other inappropriate comments or material are not acceptable.” The paper also notes that

¹ From the “Tea Party Movement,” Times Topics, NYTimes.com, updated Aug. 2, 2011, retrieved from http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/t/tea_party_movement/index.html

“comments that include ethnic slurs and/or epithets, sexist language or religious bigotry are not acceptable.” Finally, “Comments should be civil and free of threats.”

The Houston Chronicle tells readers that they should not post comments that “are fraudulent, unlawful, threatening, abusive, harassing, libelous, defamatory, obscene, vulgar, offensive, pornographic, profane, sexually explicit or indecent, or that threaten or invite violence, or that are derogatory of others on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual preference or disability.”

While each standard differs slightly from the other, all three newspapers essentially ask readers to remain civil in their remarks and refrain from ethnically and racially insensitive or hateful sentiments.

Coding Instructions:

In the sample, you will answer three questions for each comment. For each question, enter your answer (represented by a number) in the corresponding box in the coding sheet provided. Here are the questions:

1) What is the position of the commenter?

- (1) Pro-Tea Party – favors the movement; expresses conservative ideas that usually align with the Republican Party.
- (2) Anti-Tea Party – opposes the movement; expresses liberal ideas that usually align with the Democratic Party.
- (3) Neutral – neither favors nor opposes the Tea Party movement.
- (4) Can’t be determined/unclear

Tip: Many commenters do not explicitly state that they are for or against the Tea Party movement. Still, considering the whole comment, you should *interpret* as best you can what side the commenter is taking.

2) How civil is the comment?

(1) Uncivil: the comment should have at least **one** of the following: personal or inflammatory attacks (known as “flaming”), name-calling, threats, vulgarities, abusive or foul language, hateful language or expressions, including epithets, slurs and sentiments that are bigoted or which assign stereotypes.

(2) Neither especially uncivil nor especially civil: the comment should not have any of the “uncivil” characteristics. Still, the comment can be spirited. It may be impolite, contain scorn, ridicule or express derision or disapproval. The comment will fall in this category if it makes a coarse argument without resorting to hateful language. Poor manners does not necessarily equate to incivility.

(3) Civil: to be considered “civil,” the comment should not have any of the “uncivil” characteristics. The comment should be rational, well reasoned and free of any insults. The comment must be polite, respectful, courteous and considerate.

(4) Can’t be determined: the comment should fall into this category if, based on the whole comment, the tone of the comment is unclear.

Tips:

- Even if the commenter’s position can’t be determined, please code the civility of the comment, if possible. (For example, the comment — “You’re not very bright, are you?” — should be coded with a “4” in position and a “2” in civility.)
- One way to think of this is as a scale – “1” being the most **uncivil** and “3” being the most **civil**. Or as a movie rating – R, PG-13 and G.
- Be aware of your own biases when coding this category. Try to set aside any personal feelings you might have toward the topic.

2.2) If the comment is labeled “uncivil,” specify why.

Check all that apply with the corresponding number here:

- (1) Name calling
- (2) Threats
- (3) Vulgarities
- (4) Abusive or foul language
- (5) Xenophobia
- (6) Hateful language, epithets or slurs
- (7) Racist or bigoted sentiments
- (8) Disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity
- (9) Use of stereotypes

3) What is the type of argument?

(1) Informational: fact-based appeals that contextualizes an issue by supplying factual information (or at least the perception of factual information) relating to the news story or topic at hand. To qualify as “informational,” the comment should be empirical — based on data or verifiable by observation or experience.

(2) Emotional: appeals to non-factual arguments and employs psychological tactics in attempting to generate an emotional response. Contains no empirical evidence to support the opinion.

(3) Both: contains both fact-based as well as emotional appeals.

Tip: Since there’s no way to verify if any of the facts are true and valid, if you encounter a comment that uses empirical data that *you know personally* to be untrue or misleading, you should still code it as “informational.”

APPENDIX C

CODING PROTOCOL

PART III

Background and Context

Immigration:

From the time of the nation's founding, immigration has been crucial to the United States' growth and a periodic source of conflict. In recent decades, the country has experienced another great wave of immigration, the largest since the 1920s. However, for the first time, illegal immigrants outnumbered legal ones. The number of illegal immigrants peaked at an estimated 11.9 million in 2008. About 11.2 million illegal immigrants were living in the United States in 2010, a number essentially unchanged from the previous year. Republicans and Democrats have agreed for years on the need for sweeping changes in the federal immigration laws.

President Bush pushed for a bill before giving up in 2007 following an outcry from voters opposed to any path to legal status for illegal immigrants. After taking office, President Obama repeated a campaign pledge to offer a comprehensive bill before the end of 2009, but the recession dimmed the political prospects.

Immigration got the nation's attention in 2010 after the passage of an Arizona statute known as SB 1070. On July 28, 2010, one day before the law was to take effect, a federal judge blocked Arizona from enforcing the statute's most controversial provisions, including sections that called for officers to check a person's immigration status while enforcing other laws and that required immigrants to carry their papers at all times.

Since then, federal judges have struck down portions of state immigration laws in Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, Utah and South Carolina, and the topic of immigration has risen to the fore in the news – and has become a heated topic of debate among commenters in online news forums. This research seeks to gauge the civility of that online discussion.

In December 2011, the Supreme Court agreed to decide whether Arizona may impose the tough anti-immigration measures in SB 1070. The pending ramifications of the court's decision for immigration policy; for other states; and possibly for presidential politics are far-reaching.²

The sample:

Online newspaper comments were collected from nine newspapers — *The Buffalo Daily News*, the *Statesman Journal* (Salem, OR), the *Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, VT), *USA Today*, the *Detroit Free Press*, *The Indianapolis Star*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, *The Wall Street Journal* and certain blogs from the *Los Angeles Times*. These are

² From "Immigration and Emigration," Times Topics, NYTimes.com, updated Jan. 19, 2012, retrieved from <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/i/immigration-and-emigration/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=immigration&st=cse>

among the few newspapers in the country that have disallowed anonymity on their online commenting forums. Stories, columns and news blogs that dealt with immigration were chosen from each newspaper. The number of comments collected from each newspaper varied. In all, 7,736 comments were collected from 11 newspapers from 137 news items. After numbering each sample sequentially, a Web-based program randomly selected the numbers of 450 comments, which represents the sample to code.

The rules of online forums:

In explaining the rules governing their online comment boards, *The Los Angeles Times* reminds readers to “write in a common language that steers clear of personal attacks and/or vulgarities.” It says that infractions include “abusive, off-topic or foul language; racist, sexist, homophobic or other offensive terminology.” It also tells readers not to post a comment that “contains vulgar, profane, abusive, racist or hateful language or expressions, epithets or slurs, text, photographs or illustrations in poor taste, inflammatory attacks of a personal, racial or religious nature.”

The *San Jose Mercury News* similarly tells readers that “any information or materials that are unlawful, threatening, abusive, libelous, defamatory, obscene, vulgar, pornographic, profane, indecent or otherwise objectionable to us in our sole discretion” is prohibited. *The Wall Street Journal* tells readers, “You must demonstrate appropriate respect for other members. If you disagree with an opinion, feel free to challenge that opinion with a posting of your own. You must not personally attack any other member.” Further, the newspaper tells readers: “You will not upload, post or submit anything that is obscene or contains profanity or that may be hateful or offensive on racial, ethnic, sexual or any other grounds; is harmful, vulgar or distasteful; or is defamatory, libelous, or invades another person’s privacy or proprietary rights.”

While each standard differs slightly, all the newspapers essentially ask readers to remain civil in their remarks and refrain from ethnically and racially insensitive or hateful sentiments.

Coding Instructions:

In the sample, you will answer four questions for each comment. For each question, enter your answer (represented by a number) in the corresponding box in the coding sheet provided. Here are the questions:

1) What is the position of the commenter?

(1) Pro-immigration – sympathetic or supportive of undocumented immigrants, including provisions and implications of pro-immigration legislation.

(2) Anti-immigration – unsympathetic or opposed to undocumented immigrants, including provisions and implications of anti-immigration legislation.

(3) Neutral – neither favors nor opposes undocumented immigrants or takes a position that does both.

(4) Can’t be determined/unclear

Tip: Many commenters do not explicitly state that they are sympathetic or unsympathetic toward immigration. Still, considering the whole comment, you should *interpret* as best you can what side the commenter is taking. (For example, this short

comment — “Deport ‘em all!” — should be coded as a “1” since we can reasonably deduce that the commenter is unsympathetic or opposed to undocumented immigrants even though he or she doesn’t explicitly say so.)

2) Does the commenter address or mention Latinos or Latin Americans?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No

Latin Americans – are native residents of the parts of the American continent where Spanish or Portuguese is the main national language, including Mexico and, in effect, the whole of Central and South America, including many of the Caribbean islands.

Latinos – are Latin American inhabitants of the United States – either native born, foreign-born legal or undocumented immigrants.

Tip: The commenter does not have to use a specific term to describe Latinos or Latin Americans. For example, if the commenter uses the pronouns, “they” or “them,” and you understand it to be in the context of describing a Latino or Latin American, then the comment should be coded as “1.” (Considering that all of these comments follow news stories, blogs and columns about immigration, it’s reasonable to assume that many references to “they” or “them” are meant as references to Latinos). For example, this comment — “If they can’t prove they’re here legally, they should be deported back to Mexico” — should be considered a case in which a Latino is addressed. This comment — “They should learn to speak English before coming here” — should also be coded as “1” since we can reasonably assume that the commenter is referring to a Latino.

3) How civil is the comment?

(1) Uncivil: the comment should have at least **one** of the following: personal or inflammatory attacks (known as “flaming”), name-calling, threats, vulgarities, abusive or foul language, xenophobic or other hateful language or expressions, epithets or ethnic slurs, sentiments which are racist or bigoted, disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity or which assign stereotypes.

(2) Neither especially uncivil nor especially civil: the comment should not have any of the “uncivil” characteristics. Still, the comment can be spirited. It may be impolite, contain scorn, ridicule or express derision or disapproval. The comment will fall in this category if it makes a coarse argument without resorting to hateful language. Poor manners does not necessarily equate to incivility. Calling people “illegals” or “aliens” should not be considered name-calling and would fall in this category.

(3) Civil: to be considered “civil,” the comment should not have any of the “uncivil” characteristics. The comment should be rational, well reasoned and free of any insults. The comment must be polite, respectful, courteous and considerate.

(4) Can’t be determined: the comment should fall into this category if, based on the whole comment, the tone of the comment is unclear.

Tips:

- Even if the commenter’s position can’t be determined, please code the civility of the comment, if possible. (For example, the comment —

“You’re not very bright, are you?” — should be coded with a “4” in position and a “2” in civility.)

- One way to think of this is as a scale – “1” being the most **uncivil** and “3” being the most **civil**. Or as a movie rating – R, PG-13 and G.
- Be aware of your own biases when coding this category. Try to set aside any personal feelings you might have toward the topic.

3.2) If the comment is labeled “uncivil,” specify why.

Report all that apply with the corresponding number here:

- (1) Name calling
- (2) Threats
- (3) Vulgarities
- (4) Abusive or foul language
- (5) Xenophobia - fear and/or hatred of foreigners
- (6) Hateful language, epithets or slurs
- (7) Racist or bigoted sentiments
- (8) Disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity
- (9) Use of stereotypes

4) What is the type of argument?

(1) **Informational:** fact-based appeals which contextualizes an issue by supplying factual information (or at least the perception of factual information) relating to the news story or topic at hand. To qualify as “informational,” the comment should be empirical — based on data or verifiable by observation or experience.

(2) **Emotional:** appeals to non-factual arguments and employs psychological tactics in attempting to generate an emotional response. Contains no empirical evidence to support the opinion.

(3) **Both:** contains both fact-based as well as emotional appeals.

Tip: Since there’s no way to verify if any of the facts are true and valid, if you encounter a comment that uses empirical data that you know to be untrue or misleading, you should still code it as “informational.”

Example #1:

America is a country of immigrants. Millions of immigrants populate all the USA and some reasonable and humane solution should be found by a nation that claims to be 'One Nation UNDER God". This law is a bad idea. The Texas-based Perryman Group calculated that if all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Arizona, the state would lose \$26.4 billion in economic activity, \$11.7 billion in gross state product, and approximately 140,324 jobs. God Bless the USA and ALL its decent people, no matter what color, race or country of origin. And PLEASE stand up for what is right.

This comment should be labeled:

Position: “1” (sympathetic or supportive of undocumented immigrants)

Address Latino: “2” (no)

Civility: “3” (civil)

Argument type: “1” (informational)

Example #2

I applaud the Arizona governor and plan to order all my internet based purchases from Arizona based companies to show my support. The Attorney General should be removed from office. She should also expect the greatest amount of support from other true Americans who support her and the Arizona anti-illegal immigration bill. God bless her and those around her, especially those wearing the uniform of the United States military and all police organizations who put their lives on the line every day and night to keep us safe and free.

This comment should be labeled:

Position: “2” (unsympathetic or opposed to undocumented immigrants)

Address Latino: “2” (no)

Civility: “3” (civil)

Argument type: “2” (emotional)

Example #3

Gov. Jan Brewer is the best GOVERNOR in the United States! She is no dummy like the b**l-less Terminator we have in California. He can sit for hours on his butt because there is nothing there to stop him! You can't kick him in the b***s because he has none! Americans want SB 1070 to become law throughout the nation! Latinos in L.A. if you are illegal get out now before the police arrest you in the future, and stop harassing our American Athletic teams like the Lakers and the Dodgers like the jerks you are! We are tired of all of you Mexican jerks and you are making everyone hate you even more. Obama go with them!

This comment should be labeled:

Position: “2” (unsympathetic or opposed to undocumented immigrants)

Address Latino: “1” (yes)

Civility: “1” (uncivil)

- Reason:
- (1) Name calling (“jerks”)
 - (3) Vulgarities (“b**l-less,” “b***s”)
 - (5) Xenophobia
 - (7) Racist or bigoted sentiments
 - (8) Disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity

Argument type: “2” (emotional)

Example #4

I was pondering this whole debate thing on the new law from Arizona (SB 1070) since it's pre-signing to post-signing. I've read all the well thought out comments to the the most idiotic rhetorical rants here at L.A. Times, also. And it gave me a thought. It's not about race. It's not about Mexico. It's not about color. IT'S about POVERTY and EDUCATION. Class discrimination is what is happening right now. POOR people taking away jobs. POOR people taking over neighborhoods. POOR people taking advantage of benefits. POOR people overcrowding schools. POOR people being ignorant. See whats going on? If a rich Mexican was walking around, no one will take notice, would they? How about a well groomed, properly educated, upper-middle class Mexican, or Guatamalan, or Chinese, or whatever, would others take notice? Nah, not all all. So, what's the conclusion. There is none. Just that people do not like to be close to poor, uneducated folks. Look at Skid Row... anyone found a solution?

This comment should be labeled:

Position: "3" (neutral)

Address Latino: "1" (yes)

Civility: "3" (civil)

Argument type: "2" (emotional)

Example #5

You are all idiots!

This comment should be labeled:

Position: "4" (can't be determined)

Address Latino: "2" (no)

Civility: "1" (uncivil)

Argument type: "2" (emotional)

APPENDIX D

INDEX OF NEWS ITEMS

PART I — ANONYMOUS COMMENTS ON IMMIGRATION

7,539 comments from three newspapers from 35 news items
Collected a random sample of 450 (about 6 %)

Collection summary:

- 1) Los Angeles Times, (2,502 comments), 150 to code
- 2) Arizona Republic (2,504 comments), 150 to code
- 3) Houston Chronicle (2,533 comments), 150 to code

1) Los Angeles Times (2,502 comments)

Headlines, date, (number of comments)

- 1) Wilshire Boulevard traffic jammed amid big immigration-rights protesters, July 29, 2010 (44)
- 2) Questions and answers on SB 1070 -- a guide to Arizona's new immigration law, July 23, 2010 (46)
- 3) Villaraigosa: Arizona's anti-illegal immigrant backlash stems from lack of 'political courage' in Washington, July 29, 2010 (28)
- 4) What's really new about Arizona's new approach to illegal immigrants, May 14, 2010 (158)
- 5) One part of Arizona immigration law may be upheld, Nov. 2, 2010 (21)
- 6) Federal appeals court appears to support some parts of Arizona's immigration law and reject others, Nov. 1, 2010 (128)
- 7) Activists gather downtown to call for federal appeals court to overturn Arizona's immigration law, Nov. 1, 2010 (40)
- 8) Judicial panel selected to review Arizona immigration law, Oct. 31, 2010 (58)
- 9) Whitman says her former housekeeper should be deported, Oct. 29, 2010 (680)
- 10) Grass-roots immigration reform, Oct. 27, 2010 (37)
- 11) Obama defends failed immigration efforts, Oct. 25, 2010 (20)
- 12) 'I am not king': Obama tells Latino voters he can't conjure immigration reform alone, Oct. 25, 2010 (59)
- 13) Illegal immigrants can qualify for in-state college tuition, court rules, Nov. 15, 2010 (288)
- 14) The Latino paradox, Nov. 14, 2010 (134)
- 15) Arizona's fill-in governor does it again, May 12, 2010 (70)
- 16) Lakers Coach Phil Jackson says he has 'respect' for those fighting Arizona's immigration law, May 17, 2010 (83)

- 17) About that boycott of Arizona over its new illegal immigrant law? 82% of Americans say, *Nah!*, May 27, 2010 (49)
- 18) Shooting of Mexican boy by U.S. border agent ratchets up tensions, June 10, 2010 (40)
- 19) Readers respond to Arizona's strict new anti-illegal immigration law, April 16, 2010 (125)
- 20) Thousands gather for immigrant rights march in downtown L.A., May 1, 2010 (38)
- 21) Arizona governor signs nation's toughest immigration bill. What will it mean for California?, April 23, 2010 (44)
- 22) Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer abruptly suspends state's attorney general from illegal immigrant law defense, May 28, 2010 (150)
- 23) Arizona law spurs backlash among artists, June 2, 2010 (102)
- 24) Los Angeles County to boycott Arizona in protest over new immigration law, June 2, 2010 (60)
- 2) Arizona Republic (2,504 comments)
 - 25) Arizona will file expedited appeal to lift SB 1070 ruling, July 29, 2010 (58)
 - 26) Traffic delays expected from SB 1070 protests, May 20, 2010 (173)
 - 27) Arizona immigration law: Picketers ask Phoenix cops to not enforce SB 1070, July 27, 2010 (1,208)
 - 28) Arizona immigration law hit with its first 3 lawsuits, April 30, 2010 (1,065)
- 3) Houston Chronicle (2,533 comments)
 - 29) Despite signs border crime falling, fear remains, July 31, 2010 (151)
 - 30) Legal fight begins over Arizona immigration law, July 28, 2010 (1,268)
 - 31) Hospitality business in Arizona feels effects from nationwide boycotts, May 24, 2010 (60)
 - 32) Ariz. governor considers changing immigration law, July 30, 2010 (73)
 - 33) Judge strikes down part of Ariz. immigration law, July 28, 2010 (458)
 - 34) Arizona's immigration law reflects years of anger, July 25, 2010 (254)
 - 35) Debate over Arizona law churns rhetoric on both sides, July 17, 2010 (269)

APPENDIX E

INDEX OF NEWS ITEMS

PART II — ANONYMOUS COMMENTS ON TEA PARTY MOVEMENT

7,567 comments from three newspapers from 23 news items
Collected a random sample of 450 (about 6 %)

Collection summary:

- 1) Los Angeles Times, (2,506 comments), 150 to code
- 2) Arizona Republic (2,529 comments), 150 to code
- 3) Houston Chronicle (2,532 comments), 150 to code

Headlines, date, (number of comments)

1) Los Angeles Times (2,506 comments)

(From the first 17 Web pages that come up from the search)

- 1) Sarah Palin: 'I can win' the presidency, July 11, 2011 (311)
- 2) Michele Bachmann launches Iowa blitz at 'tea party' rally, July 2, 2011 (135)
- 3) Deficit battle shaping up as GOP victory, July 1, 2011 (753)
- 4) Bachmann's had her share of government aid, June 26, 2011 (342)
- 5) Bachmann may struggle in Palin's shadow, May 29, 2011 (128)
- 6) Op-Ed 'Birther' blather lives on, April 30, 2011 (408)
- 7) Op-Ed Doyle McManus: GOP wannabes, April 21, 2011 (131)
- 8) Patriot Act provisions extended just in time, May 27, 2011 (80)
- 9) The choice between low taxes vs. Medicare benefits, April 7, 2011 (110)
- 10) No party for John Boehner, April 3, 2011 (42)
- 11) Rick Perry says he's nearing decision on presidential race, July 18, 2011 (66)

2) Arizona Republic (2,529 comments)

(From the first 16 Web pages that come up from the search)

- 12) Phoenix to host Tea Party convention this weekend, Feb. 25, 2011 (480)
- 13) 'Tea party' fav Cain enters GOP presidential race, May 21, 2011 (460)
- 14) 'Tea Party Express' stop in Phoenix draws crowd, March 28, 2010 (650)
- 15) Poll: Americans cooling on "tea party," March 30, 2011 (331)
- 16) 'Tea party' hurt GOP in Senate, some grumble, Nov. 6, 2010 (144)
- 17) Michele Bachmann enters race for president, June 27, 2011 (464)

3) Houston Chronicle (2,532 comments)

(From the first 11 Web pages that come up from the search)

- 18) It's official: Republicans rule the House, Jan. 5, 2011 (139)
- 19) Tea party's O'Donnell gaining some GOP support, Sept. 20, 2010 (136)
- 20) Tea party win stuns Delaware GOP, thrills Dems, Sept. 15, 2010 (150)
- 21) Tea party movement gets a voice in Congress, July 21, 2010 (109)
- 22) Tea partiers rally on tax day, April 15, 2011 (951)
- 23) Palin rallies tea party activists in Nevada desert, March 27, 2010 (1,047)

APPENDIX F

INDEX OF NEWS ITEMS

PART III — NON-ANONYMOUS COMMENTS ON IMMIGRATION

7,736 comments from 11 newspapers from 137 news items
Collected a random sample of 450 (about 6 %)

Collection summary:

Non-border state newspapers:

- 1) Wall Street Journal, 2,583 comments collected, 50 to code
- 2) The Buffalo Daily News, 48 collected, 7 to code
- 3) Statesman Journal (Salem, OR), 57 collected, 8 to code
- 4) Burlington Free Press (Burlington, VT), 45 collected, 7 to code
- 5) Hartford Courant, 68 collected, 10 to code
- 6) Detroit Free Press, 86 collected, 13 to code
- 7) The Indianapolis Star, 32 collected, 5 to code
- 8) USA Today, 2,264 collected, 50 to code

Border state newspapers:

- 9) San Jose Mercury News, 757 collected, 100 to code
- 10) The Los Angeles Times blogs, 1,594 collected, 100 to code
- 11) El Paso Times, 202 comments, 100 to code

Headlines, date, (number of comments)

1) The Wall Street Journal (2,583 comments)

- 1) Justices Uphold Immigrant Law, May 27, 2011 (212)
- 2) Georgia Immigration Law Put on Hold, June 28, 2011 (62)
- 3) Georgia Immigration Law Faces a Test by July, June 21, 2011 (53)
- 4) More 'Silent Raids' Over Immigration, June 16, 2011 (384)
- 5) Alabama Gets Tough on Illegal Immigrants, June 10, 2011 (59)
- 6) States Rebel Over Deportations, May 14, 2011 (424)
- 7) Obama Recasts Border Issue, May 11, 2011 (462)
- 8) Immigration Replaces Economy as Top Latino Issue, June 13, 2011 (30)
- 9) Judge Partially Blocks Georgia Immigration Law, June 28, 2011 (21)
- 10) Groups Sue to Stop Alabama Immigration Law, July 8, 2011 (16)
- 11) Migrants Fall Prey to Mexican Gangs on Way to the U.S., July 19, 2011 (85)
- 12) Ex-Cons Floated as Laborers, June 16, 2011 (89)
- 13) Supreme Court Upholds Arizona Immigration Law, May 26, 2011 (16)
- 14) Advocacy Groups Sue to Block Alabama Immigration Law, July 8, 2011 (15)
- 15) Immigrant-Law Ruling Irks Some Businesses, May 28, 2011 (95)
- 16) Births Fuel Hispanic Growth, July 15, 2011 (225)
- 17) Latinos Join the Electoral Land Grab, July 6, 2011 (164)

- 18) Five Reasons to Embrace Migrants, July 17, 2011 (60)
- 19) Obama to Texas to Push for Immigration Legislation, May 8, 2011 (36)
- 20) The Mexican Paradox, May 31, 2011 (75)

Headlines, date

2) San Jose Mercury News (757 comments)

(From the first 10 Web pages that come up from the search of “immigration”)

- 1) Arrests at the Mexican border continue to drop, Dec. 6, 2011
- 2) U.S. proposes unmanned border crossing with Mexico, Dec. 11, 2011
- 3) Critics decry federal immigration arrests in South Bay, Dec. 20, 2011
- 4) Gay history and immigrant aid laws to take effect, Dec. 31, 2011
- 5) Candidate barred for English deficit vows appeal, Jan. 29, 2012
- 6) As Republicans shift west, attracting Latinos a challenge, Feb. 1, 2012
- 7) California's Catholic hierarchy takes stand against illegal-immigration dragnet, Jan. 27, 2012
- 8) Support flows in for dying father who is illegal immigrant, Jan. 31, 2012
- 9) No kidney transplant for dying dad who is illegal immigrant, Jan. 30, 2012
- 10) East Bay leaders decry mass firing after immigration audit, Dec. 16, 2011
- 11) Illegal immigrants getting major review, new chance, Jan. 13, 2012
- 12) New Obama administration rule lets some illegal immigrants stay as they seek green card, Jan. 7, 2012
- 13) Effort to block California 'Dream Act' falls short, Jan. 6, 2012
- 14) Ruben Navarrette: Obama immigration policies destroy families with American children, Nov. 22, 2011

3) The Los Angeles Times blogs (1,594 comments)

(From the first 13 Web pages that come up from the search of “immigration”)

- 1) Smuggling ring accused of using black drivers to avoid detection, Feb. 2, 2012
- 2) Mayor Villaraigosa says divisive GOP rhetoric turning off Latinos, Jan. 29, 2012
- 3) Gov. Jan Brewer: An Obama move helped launch Arizonan's career, Jan. 28, 2012
- 4) Immigration rights: U.S. launches new hotline for detainees, Dec. 29, 2011
- 5) Immigration: Another U.S. citizen deported, Jan. 5, 2012
- 6) Effort to repeal California Dream Act comes up short, Jan. 6, 2012
- 7) Year in review: The most troubling immigration trends, Dec. 20, 2011
- 8) Demonstrators denounce Alabama illegal immigration law, Nov. 15, 2011
- 9) GOP debate recap: Did Gingrich enrage anti-immigration voters?, Nov. 23, 2011
- 10) Immigration, the Justice Dept. and Alabama's schools, Nov. 15, 2011
- 11) Immigration: Feds to Alabama -- we're watching you, Dec. 6, 2011

- 12) Illegal immigrants suspected in 30 border fires in Arizona, Nov. 22, 2011
- 13) Homeland Security limits ties with Arizona's Sheriff Joe Arpaio, Dec. 15, 2011
- 14) Reaction to Alabama's new immigration law, Sept. 30, 2011
- 15) Celebrating immigration: A reason we can all agree on, Aug. 31, 2011
- 16) Immigration: Support the path to legalization, Oct. 31, 2011
- 17) The backlash against Obama's immigration plan, Aug. 22, 2011
- 18) Dream Act students cheer Obama's immigration enforcement policy, Aug. 18, 2011
- 19) Controversial immigration enforcement program is target of lively protest, Aug. 15, 2011
- 20) Immigration: Alabama's new state law has unintended consequences, Oct. 28, 2011
- 21) Bachmann and Paul on immigration, Sept. 23, 2011
- 22) 7 arrested at downtown L.A. pro-immigration protest, Aug. 24, 2011
- 23) Illegal immigration: Readers offer solutions, Oct. 27, 2011
- 24) U.S. accuses Arizona's Joe Arpaio of misconduct against Latinos, Dec. 15, 2011

4) El Paso Times (202 comments)

(From the first 20 Web pages that come up from the search of “immigration”)

- 1) Immigration: Don't leave issue to the states, Jan. 3, 2012
- 2) Texas tweaks tuition rule for undocumented immigrants, Jan. 27, 2012
- 3) Immigrant education rule tweaked: Commitment to legal residency might be emphasized, Jan. 21, 2012
- 4) Border Patrol will toughen voluntary returns; immigrants will be sent farther away, Jan. 18, 2012
- 5) Texas Tribune: Immigration falls as campaign border rhetoric soars, Dec. 9, 2011
- 6) AP Exclusive: Border Patrol to toughen policy on illegal border crossers from Mexico, Jan. 17, 2012
- 7) Feds issue scathing report against Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio, Dec. 15, 2011
- 8) Parents: Hispanic kids being bullied in Alabama immigration law's wake, Oct. 22, 2011
- 9) Police arrest 13 protesting Ala. immigration law, Nov. 15, 2011
- 10) Arrests at the Mexican border continue to drop, Dec. 6, 2011
- 11) Lawmakers ask President Obama to keep troops on border, Jan. 5, 2012
- 12) Juárez: Migrants' situation worsens with decrease in support services, Oct. 24, 2011
- 13) ICE deports record number of immigrants in year, Oct. 18, 2011
- 14) Advocates in El Paso back shift in fed immigration policy, Aug. 19, 2011
- 15) El Paso community advocates criticize Herman Cain's electrified fence joke, Oct. 18, 2011

- 16) Advocacy groups say jailed ex-Border Patrol agent targeted, Oct. 31, 2011
- 17) Herman Cain's slur: No, he wasn't joking, Oct. 21, 2011
- 18) Gov. Susana Martinez orders 10,000 to verify New Mexico residency, July 31, 2011
- 19) ICE roundup nets nearly 3,000 arrests; 60 arrested in West Texas and New Mexico, Sept. 29, 2011

5) The Buffalo Daily News (48 comments)

(From the first 20 Web pages that come up from the search of “immigration”)

- 1) Anti-immigration tone alienating Hispanics, Jan. 15, 2012
- 2) Romney says he would veto DREAM Act, Dec. 31, 2011
- 3) Hundreds of immigration law foes rally in Alabama, Dec. 17, 2011
- 4) Murder highlights need to deport illegal aliens, Nov. 11, 2011
- 5) Provide a path to citizenship, Nov. 6, 2011
- 6) Woman, 45, slain while walking to parked car, Nov. 1, 2011
- 7) Mexican president: US dumping criminals at border, Oct. 20, 2011
- 8) Ala. loses workers as immigration law takes effect, Oct. 5, 2011
- 9) Hispanic students vanish from Alabama schools, Sept. 30, 2011
- 10) 5 illegal immigrants taken into custody in Cambria, Sept. 30, 2011
- 11) Federal judge set to rule on Ala. immigration law, Sept. 28, 2011

6) Statesman Journal (Salem, OR) (57 comments)

(From the first 25 Web pages that come up from the search of “immigration”)

- 1) Americans must press for answer to Mexico's woes, Feb. 4, 2012
- 2) Obama's broken promises on immigration, Feb. 2, 2012
- 3) State use of E-verify system would aid unemployed, Feb. 3, 2012
- 4) E-Verify program beneficial to unemployed and minorities, Jan. 25, 2012
- 5) Obama plans change in immigration rule on waivers, Jan. 6, 2012
- 6) Obama takes wrong approach on immigration, 'homeland security,' Jan. 4, 2012
- 7) Advocacy groups adjust plans for session, Feb. 2, 2012
- 8) Immigrant action day held at Chemeketa, Jan. 21, 2012

7) Burlington Free Press (Burlington, VT) (45 comments)

(From the first 10 Web pages that come up from the search of “immigration”)

- 1) Court affidavit outlines second prostitution case involving Vermont farm workers, Jan. 27, 2012

8) Hartford Courant (68 comments)

(From the first 14 Web pages that come up from the search of “immigration”)

- 1) East Haven Residents React To Gallo's Retirement, Jan. 31, 2012
- 2) Mayor's Gaffe Pales Next To Police Conduct, Jan. 29, 2012
- 3) East Haven's Sins Call Us All To Action, Feb. 5, 2012
- 4) East Haven Mayor Must Go, Jan. 30, 2012
- 5) Fire Police Chief, Don't Let Him Retire, East Haven Commission Urges Mayor, Jan. 31, 2012
- 6) At Heart Of Discrimination Case, Priest Takes Fight To Police, Jan. 21, 2012
- 7) FBI: 4 Arrested Police Officers Were "Bullies With Badges", Jan. 25, 2012

9) Detroit Free Press (86 comments)

(From the first 10 Web pages that come up from the search of “immigration.” Like many Gannett papers, the online paper only archives stories for 30 days, limiting the number of comments that can be captured.)

- 1) Free workshop in Southfield helps immigrants become U.S. citizens, Jan. 21, 2012
- 2) Human trafficking is growing almost as fast as drug trade, officials say, Jan. 22, 2012
- 3) Mom can stay in U.S. while deportation case is reviewed, Jan. 10, 2012
- 4) Human trafficking convictions in Michigan, Jan. 22, 2012

10) The Indianapolis Star (32 comments)

- 1) Ruben Navarrette: Straight talk on immigration, Feb. 1, 2012
- 2) Ruben Navarrette: Pay some attention to Mexico, Feb. 5, 2012
- 3) Local women's group reaches out to those just arriving in U.S. to celebrate diversity, help with acclimation, Jan. 19, 2012
- 4) Women's group helps local newcomers adjust to life in U.S., Jan. 19, 2012
- 5) Esther Cepeda: A Latino identity crisis, Jan. 19, 2012
- 6) Esther Cepeda: The need for a bilingual America, Feb. 2, 2012
- 7) Ruben Navarrette: Obama's broken promise, Jan. 27, 2012

11) USA Today (2,264 comments)

(From the first 30 Web pages that come up from the search of “immigration”)

- 1) Kidney transplant refused to Calif. father in U.S. illegally, Jan 31, 2012
- 2) Column: Gov. Jan Brewer intimidated by president? Really?, Jan. 30, 2012
- 3) Police chief retiring in Conn. town amid racial scandal, Jan. 30, 2012
- 4) Rubio: GOP 'too slow' to condemn anti-immigrant talk, Jan 27, 2012
- 5) Romney, Gingrich slam Obama to Hispanic voters, Jan 27, 2012

- 6) Brewer invited Obama to visit border, Jan 27, 2012
- 7) Column: Repeal Alabama's immigration law, Jan. 26, 2012
- 8) Florida could test GOP's stance on immigration, Jan. 25, 2012
- 9) Ala., Ga. farmers adjust planting after immigration crackdown, Jan. 20, 2012
- 10) Obama picks former immigration advocate as a top adviser, Jan 10, 2012
- 11) Calif. bans car tow practice that hit illegal immigrants, Dec 27, 2011
- 12) Joe Arpaio: We're enforcing the law, Dec. 27, 2011
- 13) States make daily life harder for illegal immigrants, Dec. 20, 2011
- 14) #tellusatoday: Should high court back Ariz. immigration law?, Dec. 15, 2011
- 15) Rick Perry defends Ariz. Sheriff Joe Arpaio, Dec 15, 2011
- 16) High court will examine state immigration laws, Dec. 12, 2011
- 17) Letters: Little sympathy for woman deported from U.S., Dec. 6, 2011
- 18) Dictionary's definition of 'anchor baby' draws fire, Dec 05, 2011
- 19) Deportations tear some families apart, Dec. 5, 2011
- 20) Editorial: Alabama nets more than illegal immigrants, Dec. 4, 2011
- 21) Column: Immigration law stains my Alabama, Dec. 2, 2011
- 22) #tellusatoday: How to fix illegal immigration?, Dec. 1, 2011

APPENDIX G

SAMPLES OF UNCIVIL ANONYMOUS COMMENTS

1) Illigals have been here for decades (for a reason). If u armchair quarterbacks wanna get rid of them, why dont u form an army and hunt them down like deer.

— *Posted on LATimes.com*

2) ENOUGH OF THE RACE CARD, YOU GREEDY POLITICIANS AND BUSINESS PEOPLE! IF BREWER DOES NOT SIGN THIS VERY MELLOW BILL IT WILL BE UP TO US TO GRAB THE BROOM AND START GETTING RID OF THE ROACHES. SO THE BLOODY MEXICAN GOVERNMENT IS AGAINST THIS? AND WHO GAVE THEM PERMISSION TO SPEAK?!! GET YOUR BABY DROPPERS, YOUR (inappropriate term), YOUR GANGS, YOUR DRUG DEALERS, RAPISTS, THIEVES, AND DRUNKS BACK TO YOUR DARNED COUNTRY @#\$%^%6!

— *Posted on AZCentral.com*

3) Let the illegals all leave Arizona, and go to one of the sanctuary states which will get all the obama cash to pay for the fleecing of their welfare system, the a-n-c-h-o-r babies, the food stamps, free cheeze, and the crime. I say good riddance to bad rubbish.

— *Posted on AZCentral.com*

4) damn illegals. I hope they choke on their beans.

— *Posted on Chron.com*

5) Had I been there I would have run them over. Get the heck out of the street. What about protesting the billbions of dollars te illegals are stealilng from my children in the form of California borrowing to pay for thier sorry arses.

— *Posted on LATimes.com*

6) Don't worry Jason, I just put my gas mask on. I have to wear it when I'm passing the fat bean eaters who illegally roam the streets of L.A.

— *Posted on LATimes.com*

7) DEPORT EM ALL.....ONLY THE WEAK NEEDS NEEDS EM....IF I HAD ME WAY...TAKE 5000 HUM VEEES WITH 50 CALIBERS PUT THEM ON THE BORDER.....SHOOT ANYTHING THAT MOVES...THEN USE BUNKER BUSTERS ON THE TUNNELS...THEN INVADE MEXICO AND KILL EM ALL...IT WILL BE BE CLEAN AND SANITARY...HEHHHEHEHH

— *Posted on LATimes.com*

8) Mexicans have become a superhuman race. Like cockroaches they've become immune to the undrinkable water in Mexico, the lead tainted candies and the extra healthy lard diet cooking they're so famous for. Even the long extinct diseases they

bring into America can't kill them. They're obesity only seems to make them stronger and the alcohol preserves they're vital organs. No wonder they live so long.

— *Posted on LATimes.com*

9) Get rid of all the slime who snuck into the country, and are depressing our economy, working entry level jobs for less than minimum wage, so they can just send it home. Allowing them to stay only encourages more of the rats to sneak up here.

— *Posted on AZCentral.com*

10) Frankly, I think we should post a machine-gun tower every hundred meters along th border from California to Texas and from Washington to Maine, and anything crossing illicitly needs to be shot and killed on the spot.

— *Posted on Chron.com*

11) The thing is that roof rats are not here to hurt anyone, they are here to find food and breed.

— *Posted on AZCentral.com*

12) If I were elected President, I would have a shoot to kill law enacted on all illegals coming into the U.S. It wouldn't take to long before our friends to the south got the message...then we would see how many come across the border. That would take care of the OTM folks as well.

— *Posted on Chron.com*

13) Finally someone has got the balls to do something about the invasion of this great country. The mexican invasion "la raza". I hope to god this comes to California so we can clean up some of these blood sucking leaches. Lets see 20 million illegals, 15 million unemployed Americans. 12.6% official unemployment in California, but we all know it is more like 25%. Hopefully Obama gets his head out of his ass and puts the military on the border. We should also damn off all the water that goes south, tax 90% all remittance payments that go western union or any other wire service. Just my 2c.

— *Posted on LATimes.com*

14) So, Sherriff Joe took out 1/4 of all of the US tally on deportation. His town now has jobs and housing. This is 1 county.Come on folks...it's a no brainer...Legal..I welcome you..Illegal..well, you are illegal. They are like roaches..get them out!!!

— *Posted on Chron.com*

15) So it worked, congrats to Arizona. They proved their point and got rid of 50% of the resource sucking roaches.

— *Posted on LATimes.com*

16) You say illegals come here for a better life??? If that be the case, why then do they turn their neighborhoods into cesspools??? The barrios where the mass majority of illegals live are filled with their illegal anchor baby gang bangers, drug

dealers, car thefts and broken down homes. If you don't like the conditions in Mexico then fight to change them, don't come here and drag your crap along with you.

— *Posted on LATimes.com*

17) BULLSCHIT! What we don't want here are stupid people like you Macias, and ILLEGALS!!! DO YOU UNDERSTAND IT NOW? LEGAL citizens that PAY TAXES so when their children go to school, it is their parents that are contributing to the cost of their education. LEGAL citizens that PAY TAXES so when any one of their family members have to go to the hospital, they are contributing to their health-care costs. LEGAL citizens that PAY TAXES so when an unfortunate time hits in their lives when one might lose their job and they begin to need help from welfare, they would have previously paid into the system. IS THIS CLEAR ENOUGH????????? If you can't grasp this, then yes Macias, you are too stupid to live here!!! Cities and States all throughout the U.S. are BROKE because there is this constant paying for the upkeep of the lives of people that DON'T PAY INTO THE SYSTEM!!!!!! WE CANNOT AFFORD ILLEGALS!!!!!! GET OUT!!!!!! TAKE YOUR ANCHOR BABIES WITH YOU!!!!!!!!!! THIS BILL MUST BE PASSED!!!

— *Posted on Chron.com*

18) All this chat about Austin ... property taxes skyrocketing, Mexican Mafia, M13 or whatever the Salvadorian gang is, crack, meth, bulk drug distribution hub, public schools unattendable, (base tuition for private schools 24K/yr/kid), projects filled with trick trucks, rims, young men with cell phones. Illegals vote in all elections, stack the ERs, drain WIC, 14 anchor babies born every day in 1 hospital, repeat 1 hospital, a day. Rape victim of choice: 8 yr-olds, if the little girls can make it to 12-yrs old without being raped they have aged out. Vehicles parked in yards, pit bulls on chains or running loose, litter piling up, plastic bags wafting thru the air, 92 occupants/dwelling, censored news, and on and on.. Austin is Mecca, come on up.

— *Posted on Chron.com*

19) whats up with a bunch of w/.e/et/bac/ks who comprise 13 percent of the population in the us think anyone gives a dang about them there are 62 subgroups of people labeled caucasian and they are all lumped together and given nothing but a hard a/s/s in most instances ive never seen such a bunch of unamerican americans fighting for the rights of criminals most of these people are felons because theyve crossed the border once in mexico they make all foreigners show id to the police they are robbed they are killed they are treated like s h i > so why shouldnt we just treat illegal aliens like mexico does they can hold office and whole bunch of stuff and here theyre coddled like a bunch of crying babies

— *Posted on AZCentral.com*

20) We all need to fire our mexican lawn crews and refuse to eat at mexican restaurants - send them all home.

— *Posted on Chron.com*

APPENDIX H

SAMPLES OF UNCIVIL NON-ANONYMOUS COMMENTS

1) Jose Camaron, we apparently need ONLY to look at your name to understand why you say vomit! If YOU are an ILLEGAL ALIEN, get YOUR ass out of the country and then try to do it the LEGAL WAY! It's the ILLEGAL ALIENS that make the LEGAL CITIZENS vomit!!!! Maybe you weren't taught that MEXICO SOLD the land to America LEGALLY!!! Get your facts and GET THE HELL OUT if you are not LEGAL!!

— *Posted in USAToday.com*

2) WAKE UP AND SMELL THE COFFEE !you are just mad because joe is doing his job and you have something to hide !!!!! yea maybe we should just sit back and let the mexicans take over the USA.. "NOT" go home ...no more dope deals,stealling , killing, robbing, taking jobs , and being here illegally...WE ARE TIRED OF THE SH@\$.....go home you have no civil rights...how about we give you what we would get in mexico....ha, JOE ARPAIO FOR PRESIDENT

— *Posted in USAToday.com*

3) If the nukes were flying and soon to strike, would we be going through the courts to see if we should, or could, respond? We are under attack by these alien invaders and we must immediately, completely rid my country of the alien invaders. Off my land, off my roads, out of my schools, and out of my pocket. After all, the problem is not why the illegal aliens have come here, the problem is that they are here. I demand mass deportation of illegal aliens and their progeny NOW!

— *Posted in USAToday.com*

4) GOP under Bush was no better as he also did CRAP on this issue! Put our troops when they come home from IRAQ on the Mexican border and NO rubber bullets!

— *Posted in USAToday.com*

5) Upon sight of them, SHOOT THE FATHER and kill him. As soon as the mother has the baby, put the kid in a foster home where it will obviously be raised better than it's dead, deadbeat parents would have raised it. Then kill the mother. Drop their dead bodies from an airplane, over mexico. Perhaps the couple right behind them will turn around and go have their demon seed in their own country. It might sound bad, but I guarantee if we'd start doing it, it wouldn't take long to STOP this practice from happening altogether. When the child gets old enough, draft them and place them on the border with a gun, and orders to shoot anyone who crosses over to our side. Use their own offspring to control our borders and keep them on their own side of the fence. ARE YOU OFFENDED YET? BECAUSE I AM! I am deeply offended that my country is being stolen one piece at a time by a bunch of lazy, evil, deadbeat parasites who don't deserve to live. You enter my country ILLEGALLY, and you should DIE! God knows what would happen to me if I crossed YOUR borders illegally! I'm sick and tired of

political correctness. I've had enough, and it's time for all americans to stand up and FIGHT BACK!

— *Posted in USAToday.com*

6) How are we mean spirited people? Follow the laws or get out!!!! Illegals are a drain on our economy and they also bring down the value of our homes!! They dont want to follow our laws so get the HELL OUT!! If you dont like it then you can leave too!!!!!!

— *Posted in USAToday.com*

7) You are an idiot if you believe that. We can't even hike the very land we pay taxes on due to cartel members running with automatic weapons up there. Now we pay more to clean it up after them, hire more forest rangers and arm them now, arrest, deport and start all over again next month with the same people. I think we should just shoot to kill and be done with it the first time. Also, if they cared so much about their family and breaking it up, why they come break our laws in the first place? They asked for it. They did this to their children, NOT US!!!!

— *Posted in MercuryNews.com*

8) Illegal is illegal! What's hard to understand about that concept? If you are here in our country without the correct immigration papers and procedures you are breaking the Law! Law breakers are arrested on the spot and taken to jail, that's what cops are there to do! We have to get rid of 20 Million illegals before November 2012 of ACORN will bus them to the polls to vote the foreign Muslim Communist usurper back into our highest office and give him four more years to destroy American Capitalism and push New World Order Communism down our throats! If our citizens with southern roots find this unacceptable, they are free to go back home down south also! If they are now citizens and want to assimilate into our culture and behave like true Americans they should be turning in their illegal brothers and sisters! That's what American citizens would do! Do it Amigos, or get out! We don't need no stinking wet-backs!

— *Posted in USAToday.com*

9) Juan-nice try, illegal-it is amnesty for so called "students" up to 35-what 35 year old is still in school?? we dont need any more poor, unskileld, uneducated peopel here-this amnesty will increase the flow of cockroaches-must be stopped.

— *Posted in LATimes.com*

10) Funny how some of these monkeys call you racist but make no mention of him being illegal. Let hiom go back top mexico and get a kidney. What part of illegal do you all NOT understand and YES his illegal alien status SHOULD prevent him from getting it. That is the problem here, these roaches run across the border, cry racism, and then get what they want. How would mexico deal with an illegal roach?

— *Posted in MercuryNews.com*

11) your still just a beaner, wearing a green suit didn't change your status in society at all!

— *Posted in ElPasoTimes.com*

12) Why don;t you talk to OBUMMA and Holder about enforcing the laws. Look at his illegal leaching Aunt! SHE NEED TO BE DEPRTEED! BUt no of course not, why because of OBUMMA> THROW ILLEGALS BACK OVER THE FENCE TODAY> The electrify it! ZAP!!!

— *Posted in Courant.com*

13) Sorry, the thousands who've died in 100+ degree heat are just dumb Mexicans.

— *Posted in ElPasoTimes.com*

14) California I agree. I have no problem with people becoming citizens but I have a problem when people are giving people with ILLEGAL status special privilege over my kids. We are a flood of a bleeding heart. I am sick of the illegals saying they hate America and laugh in our faces at how stupid we are, what fools and laugh and talk amongst each other in Spanish (I speak Spanish cause I was forced to--another issue I have) so I know they talk bad about us but want the handouts? F*** that. I am sick of this. It's not the right thing to do. We are going to pay big time and then it will be ex posto facto--finito, too late to fix it. Someone needs to tie the women's legs together and stop having frickin babies. It's really ridiculous to keep having babies if you don't have any frickin money and expect people to help you. Whatever.

— *Posted in LATimes.com*

15) "Bashing their own people"..... You silly little Pocha! Those people are citizens of the UNITED STATES. The people they are "Bashing" are MEXICAN NATIONALS that are destroying our way of life. Now if you are SIDING with foreign nationals to destroy our country, you are a traitor. They are NOT YOUR PEOPLE and they do not care about you. They'll hit you in their car, get out and run away. They are not your friends. You need to decide who's side you're on.

— *Posted in LATimes.com*

16) Na the Mexican men are just dating and marrying White girls in CALIFORNIA it's like a epidemic here to see a short Mexican in walmart with a White girl that is pregnant pushing a baby stroller with a Half breed brown babie

— *Posted in LATimes.com*

17) The poor, poor, illegal alien mesicans! They are just poor innocent victims of the gringo Americans. All those murders, victims of drunk driving mesicans, victims of home invasions, car jackings, identity fraud, kidnappings, and so much more, it's just the imagination of those racist white Americans! The 400 BILLION being spent annually by the U.S. taxpayer to support & pay for illegal alien mesicans is reparations for all the injustices perped by the gringo! Time for all you gringos to get on your knees, grab your ankles, and prepare for your just punishment!

— *Posted in LATimes.com*

18) Scared? Not even joseb, I just want you slimy criminals to go back to your own cesspool third world crime infested country and quit trying to ruin America.

— *Posted in LATimes.com*

19) I think anyone with a latino name needs sterilized. No more brood mares breeding 5 to a father and collecting welfare, hud, food stamps, and free food bank boxes while their men work for the cartels in our forests and cities. They are filthy, no medical checks and they teach their children nothing except how to be a feral filthy thief who takes what they want since their parents did. The little brats can't even speak good English even though they are born here since everyone around them refuse to comply also. Disgusting breed of "humans". I watched one pick her feet and eat the dead skin from her fingers..then go back to picking our food in the fields. I turned in the farmer who hired his nasty workers. Since mexicans have gotten involved in our food industry, its more germ and disease laden than ever before. They don't get vaccinations, medical checkups, cross contamination training, nothing...just nasty.

— *Posted in MercuryNews.com*

20) when he dies it will be one less illegal alien can i have his job

— *Posted in MercuryNews.com*

21) Help one and more come. Our borders are already too porous and it must stop somewhere. I can barely afford to support my own family's medical needs and bristle at the thought that some criminal here illegally deserves MY support. He isn't my neighbor. He's a leech.

— *Posted in MercuryNews.com*

22) F\$ck the illegal aliens!!!!!!!!!! they get free medical, education on my tax dollar..time to start shooting these as\$holes..

— *Posted in MercuryNews.com*

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